

A Teenage Love Song

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A Teenage Love Song

by [HaleHathNoFury \(My_Trex_has_fleas\)](#)

Summary

Stiles is sick and tired of how much he fucks up. His dad is disappointed, his step-mom judges and his step-brother can do no wrong. It's not that he doesn't love them, he just gets so tired of being different. Now he's being moved lock, stock and barrel to Beacon Hills aka the town his mom grew up in so they can go live in his grandma's house and his father can get him back on the straight and narrow.

It's going to suck.

Chapter 1

Stiles hunkered down in the back seat of the SUV, toying with his lip ring and staring out the window. It was a ten year old Toyota, the best his dad could do on a city salary after counting out the living costs of paying for living in LA, keeping a family, a decent insurance policy to cover Scott's medical care. It hadn't been enough though and when Noah had taken a bullet a year earlier, he'd been offered a decent payout and he'd taken it. Two months later Stiles' maternal grandmother had finally passed and it transpired that, as her only grandchild and with her only daughter dead, Stiles had inherited everything she had. It wasn't much, a twenty thousand dollar savings account that would go into Stiles' college fund and her house in Beacon Hills. It was the town his mom had come from and that she'd left as soon as she'd graduated to go to college where she'd met Noah and never returned. Even Stiles' birth hadn't merited a visit and he only remembered meeting his Babcia three times in his life, all of which had happened at their little house in Encino.

Now he was stuck in the back seat with his stepbrother and best friend Scott, his dad and Melissa sitting up front and arguing as to the quickest way to get onto the I5 and up to Northern California. Beacon Hills was north west of Sacramento, sitting in a hollow and surrounded by natural preserve that eventually led into the Mendocino National Forest. It had a population of around 30,000 people, the surrounding county standing at half a million and it looked like it was straight out of a suburban fantasy with its pretty little houses and a downtown that was quaintly colonial.

Stiles had hated it on sight. There was no way in hell he was going to fit in for one. He doubted that his new school would be as inured to piercings and tattoos as his last one had been. He couldn't say anything though. The main reason they were headed up north was so that Noah and Melissa could get him away from the 'bad influences' at his school and get his behaviour under control. It had started with his Adderall, meandered through his mom's pain meds into a well worn path of weed, booze and the occasional Oxy. He was smart and enterprising, making connections with people he could buy from and finding ever increasingly conniving ways of evading detection but he'd still tripped up and gotten busted and the look of disappointment on his father's face had cut right through him.

His mom's death hadn't been the beginning but it had certainly catapulted Stiles into unhealthy coping mechanisms, which had seen him taken out of school and sent into the next year so he could adjust. He had gone to school high most days in the past year, his natural genius carrying him through enough that his grades had still been remarkable. Even using all his birthday money from said absent Babcia on getting himself stuck with all kinds of needles hadn't really been enough to raise any alarms. It had only been when he'd nearly wrapped his Jeep around a tree with Scott in the passenger's seat that Melissa had really put her foot down and insisted on changes. She and Noah had been only dating then, but the writing had been on the wall and Stiles hadn't taken the news well that his mom was being replaced. He'd gone to their wedding kicking and screaming and fought against it the entire time before skipping the reception and going to get high the very same night, prompting his father to lament the fact that Scott wasn't his son instead. After all Noah had married Melissa barely two years after Claudia had died.

Cue Stiles' next disappointment. And his next.

His last had been because his girlfriend at the time, a sweet-faced blonde named Heather who'd actually gotten him believing he could make it, had been taken out in a car crash along with her entire family. Stiles had been drunk at the funeral.

He'd overheard his father and stepmother arguing about how much debt they had and that most of it was the result of Stiles' inability to sort himself the fuck out, quote unquote. He'd ended up in hospital, blacked out on alcohol and pills. It had been Scott who had found him and that had finally shocked Stiles into behaving until they left.

So there he was, a fuck up at eighteen with chronic anxiety, ADHD and emotional trauma from losing his mother at age twelve. Meanwhile next to him, Scott was sitting and chattering away because he was normal, a nasty case of asthma aside. He never even so much as smoked, fearful it would kill him and the contrast between his clean cut church-going puppy dog looks and Stiles' full sleeve tattoos and face full of metal was enough to make most people do a double take when they met him. He was dumb and friendly and as awkward as fuck and Stiles loved him so much because he was the only person in the world who stuck around long enough to be friends with him.

He sighed and dug out his phone, only recently returned to him, flicking through the tabs that he'd pulled up about Beacon Hills. The place was weirdly crime ridden considering its suburban appearance. The local newspaper had detailed the deaths of at least thirty people in the past decade, including an unsolved fire that had burned almost an entire family of eleven people inside their own house. Stiles had devoured every story related to it and the others as well. There had been car crashes and animal attacks in numbers that were distinctly abnormal. There had even been several murders and he'd gone into research mode in a desperate attempt to keep his mind busy at the prospect of moving to fucking nowhere.

'Stiles?' He looked up, realising too late that Melissa had obviously been speaking to him.

'Sorry.' He studied his hands around the phone, the nails that had been bitten down to the quick and the faint silver lines that showed on the pale skin of his wrist and leading under the cuff of his red hoodie. 'I wasn't listening.'

Melissa managed to contain her obvious exasperation. She was far more patient with him than Noah was but the past six months had been rough. The fine lines around her dark eyes were more noticeable than usual and she looked tired, her olive skin waxy and stretched too tight.

'I asked if you were hungry.' she said and Stiles glanced around him in confusion. He saw that they were out in open country and he frowned.

'How long have we been travelling?' he asked and Melissa gave him a concerned look.

'Three hours.' Noah answered, his grey eyes concerned when they met Stiles' in the rear view mirror.

Stiles' blood went cold and he looked at Scott, seeing that unsettled look on his step-brother's face that had become more and more prevalent in the past year. It wasn't the first time he'd lost time like that, but he was usually much better at hiding it and living in denial. One of his mother's first symptoms had been time lapses and blackouts and Stiles didn't want to think of what that meant.

'I must have dropped off.' he said, playing it casual. 'Yeah, I could eat.' As if to emphasise his point his stomach growled loudly.

'Okay.' Melissa gave him a relieved smile. 'We'll stop at the next place.'

It was a small mom and pop diner, the food tasty and filling but not winning any awards for creativity. Stiles forced his burger and curly fries down, swallowing against the bile in his throat. Before he'd been a fiend for curly fries but it was getting more difficult to even feign interest in food anymore and he knew he'd dropped weight. His jeans hung off his skinny hips and there were

dark shadows under his eyes, the price of being clean. At least the weed had made him hungry enough to maintain a steady intake of calories.

‘So when we get there, we’ll take a drive around while Melissa and Scott get started on the house.’ Noah was saying. ‘Show you the school. Your babcia’s house is way out on the edge of the preserve so you’ll need to drive you and Scott to school and back.’

‘That’s cool.’ Stiles said. Noah had driven the Jeep up the week before when he’d gone to see the house and start taking their things up. Scott had gone with him but Stiles had still been confined and he’d missed it.

‘And seeing as Scott’s already found himself a part-time job, I’ll be expecting you to do the same.’ Noah added and Stiles resisted the urge to roll his eyes. Of course, Scott had found a job. He wanted to be a vet and the local clinic had taken him on as an assistant. He looked down at his plate, catching a glimpse of Scott’s apologetic face. Not that it was his fault that Stiles was a hot mess, but it did make everything he did that much worse when compared with Scott’s golden boy behaviour.

‘Fine.’ He kept his tone neutral. He did not want to antagonise his father and even the wrong way of saying something would set off an argument these days. Not that Stiles was innocent, he readily admitted that. He knew he pushed buttons and sassed his way into insolence as an excuse to hide his self-loathing and it was easy.

‘Good.’ Noah signalled for the check. ‘Just another two hours and we’ll be there.’

Stiles took in a deep breath and then looked up.

‘I need to go to the restroom.’ He got up and walked away from the table, well aware of the three pairs of eyes trained on him. At least he was being allowed to go alone and not have Scott babysit him. Thank fuck for small mercies.

Inside the cubicle, he sat on the closed toilet and fought the wave of panic rising inside him. It was getting harder and harder to control it, the feeling like he was slowly suffocating. It made him sick to his stomach and he heaved, managing to get the lid lifted in time for the cheap burger to make a reappearance. It burned coming back out and he puked until he choked, slumping to the floor when he was done, the sour taste of vomit the only thing he could grasp. His ears were ringing and he closed his eyes to fight the dizziness.

More symptoms. Maybe he was going to die just like his mom had. That wasn’t as bad as it sounded. Stiles quiet liked the idea, the thought of being able to lie down and sleep and never get back up again. He didn’t want the pain though. He was too much of a coward for that.

‘Stiles?’ The sound of the door and Scott’s voice brought him back and he staggered to his feet, sheepishly emerging and avoiding looking at him directly.

‘Guess that didn’t agree with me.’ he said and went over to the sink to rinse his mouth.

‘Fuck.’ Scott had a hand on his shoulder. ‘Are you okay?’

‘I will be.’ Stiles replied, giving him a wan smile. ‘Don’t worry, okay?’

‘I can’t help it.’ Scott had his puppy face on. ‘I don’t want you to die.’

And there it was, the wave of guilt so powerful it almost had Stiles running for the bowl again. He gritted his teeth and forced a smile.

'I won't,' he lied.

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The next two hours went by in a blur and the next time Stiles looked up, they were driving through a town that looked like any other cookie cutter All American suburbia. He listened with half an ear as they went by the Sheriff's station where his father would be working (by complete coincidence there seemed to be a longstanding difficulty in recruiting staff and the Sheriff's position had been handed to Noah basically on a platter), the hospital where Melissa would be working and finally the school.

'They have an excellent lacrosse team,' Noah said. 'And their academic program is solid. If you pull your head out of your ass, you could get into an Ivy league school.'

Stiles kept his mouth shut and peered out the window. It was only a week until the start of semester and he and Scott would be juniors but he'd given little to no thought about extracurriculars or even school work. The school looked nice, probably one of those places that held pep rallies and had decent facilities and a clique of glossy haired teenagers with clear skin and no vices beyond the occasional nude on social media.

'Think I can join the team?' Scott sounded wistful and Stiles felt bad for him. He wasn't popular or sporty or even smart enough to fit in with the nerds. Instead he drifted between groups and stuck to Stiles like a burr, which was no good for anyone.

'Sure,' Melissa smiled. 'So long as you make sure you always have your inhaler with you and we inform the school about your condition.'

They pulled away and Stiles rested his chin on his hand and watched the trees go by as they drove through a residential area and then the houses became sparse and the lots grew bigger. He felt an odd kind of pull inside him, an easing of the low key nausea he'd learned to live with, and Stiles sat up straighter.

'We're in the middle of nowhere,' Scott sounded whiny and Stiles snorted.

'You've got your bike,' he replied and Scott stuck his tongue out at him. Stiles smirked at him and then lay back against the seat. The trees were changing, the pines thinning out and turning to gnarled deciduous forest. Stiles still remembered the names from his eighth grade biology project and he went through them in his head.

Sycamore...black walnut...alder...ash.

'Here we are,' Noah announced and then they were turning to the right and going down a long drive that had trees growing over it to form a leafy roof. They were thick either side and it was only after about a minute of driving that the lane opened up and there it was, his grandmother's house. It was technically Stiles, even if it was now going to be their new family home. The fact that it was owned outright meant they would be starting well financially and it was the least he could do after his bullshit.

'Wow,' Melissa was smiling. 'I keep forgetting how beautiful it is.'

Stiles was dumbstruck. He hadn't been interested in the house but now he could see it, it was a far more pleasant surprise than he'd been expecting. He opened his door and fell out, catching himself before he faceplanted and then took it all in. It was a clapboard Victorian, painted a faded dove grey with white trimming on the windows and the porch that ran the entire front of the house. The

roof was vaulted and gabled and the whole place was surrounded by trees except for a small patch of very overgrown lawn to the side. A trellis at the end of the porch was swamped by a white rambling rose, the late blooms filling the air with a rich sweet scent.

‘This is where Mom was born?’ he found himself asking and for once the look Noah gave him was soft.

‘Yeah.’ He came over and his hand was warm on Stiles’ shoulder. ‘It’s really something, huh?’

‘It is.’ Stiles was frozen. He’d always been something of a romantic and this looked right out of a novel.

‘Why don’t you go have a look inside?’ Melissa was at the trunk. ‘You haven’t seen it yet. You can pick out your room.’

‘But...’ Scott started, sounding a little put out until Melissa shushed him.

‘It’s his house, Scott.’ she said pointedly. ‘Stiles gets first pick.’

Stiles look at Noah and he got a half-smile and a nod.

‘Go on, kid.’ he said. ‘Take a look.’

Stiles felt a rush of excitement, something he’d not had for a while, and started forward. He approached the porch steps, feeling a sense of trepidation as he climbed the first one, studying the building and cataloguing the details. The paint was peeling in places but it looked sturdy enough. There were lace curtains in the front windows and as he got to the top step, Stiles saw something that caught his eye. At the bottom of the plinth of the right hand side, there were some odd shapes carved into the wood. They had clearly been painted over before but weathering had exposed them and he crouched to study them. They were unfamiliar to him apart from a triskelion, the last one in the row. Stiles felt a strange urge to touch them and he did, pressing his fingers to the wood.

He did not expect the sensation of being zapped, like he was getting a dose of static electricity from a metal door handle, and he snatched his hand away in surprise.

‘Stiles?’ Noah asked from the car. ‘Are you alright?’

‘Yeah.’ He stumbled to his feet and played it cool. ‘Just a splinter.’

‘Suck on it.’ Scott snickered.

Stiles gave him the finger and then bounded up the rest of the way, ignoring his father’s admonishment.

‘The key’s under the mat.’ Melissa called and he huffed at the lack of security, taking it out and unlocking the front door.

‘That’s going to change.’ he muttered to himself and let himself into the house.

It was so still inside, the air thick with dust motes that floated past his face. Stiles waved a hand to watch them dance and looked around him. He was in the entrance hall, a living room to his right and what looked like the dining room to his left. There were some pieces of furniture covered in sheets and a corridor that ran past the stairs to what he knew would be the kitchen. It felt familiar in a way nothing else ever had and he had to stand still for a second and breathe deeply to steady himself.

He didn't know he knew which way to go, but Stiles was racing up the stays with a joyful giggle bursting out him before he even knew what he was doing. His feet thumped on the bare wooden stairs all the way up until he was on a tiny landing with a single door leading off of it and realised he was right at the top of the house. The door itself was unremarkable, apart from a still polished brass knob. Stiles grinned and panted from the exertion of bolting up three flights of stairs and took hold of it, astonished and yet not when he felt the same little tingle of electricity in his fingers. This time he didn't let go, turning the knob and pushing the door open.

He was in the attic, a vast empty space lit by four gabled windows, one for each side of the house. The roof was steeply angled at the sides and he strode across the floor, heading for the window at the back. It was thick with grime and Stiles tugged his sleeve over his hand and used it to clear a small patch of glass so he could see out. He looked down into the yard at the back, sizeable and stretching into the trees. It was also overgrown, obviously not tended for a long time and Stiles gave up on trying to see it clearly through the pane. He worked the catch, pushing it to open and leaning out to get a better look.

He saw what seemed to have been beds once upon a time, what looked like more roses and the remains of a greenhouse. He was following the outline of the fence when he stopped, seeing someone standing in the shadows of the trees and looking back at him. It was a boy, probably the same age or maybe a little older than himself, and Stiles frowned. The other teen was tall and had black hair, dressed in jeans and a leather jacket that looked too big for him and Stiles wondered who the hell he was and how he had come to be standing at the back fence.

The boy stared back at him and so Stiles, always one to push at something, raised a hand in greeting. The boy looked bemused and then took one hand from his pocket and did the same. They kept watching each other until Stiles heard Noah yelling for him from downstairs.

'Just a minute!' he yelled back but when he turned to look out the window again, the boy was gone. It was as if he'd vanished into thin air and Stiles blinked, wondering if maybe he was having a hallucination.

'Whoa!' Scott said from behind him. 'This is epic.'

Stiles turned around and grinned.

'Dibs.' he said and Scott laughed.

'How did you get the door open?' he asked and Stiles gave him a quizzical look.

'What do you mean?' he asked. 'It was open.'

'It wasn't last week.' Scott told him. 'We couldn't find a key and it was definitely locked.'

'What?' Stiles was confused. He was about to ask for clarification when Noah came in, puffing a little.

'You found the key?' he asked and Stiles shook his head.

'No.' he replied. 'It just opened.'

'No shit.' Noah looked around him. 'You know this is where your mom used to sleep when she was little. I remember her talking about it.'

'Really?' Stiles smiled. 'Can I have it?'

‘Yes.’ Noah replied. ‘It’ll certainly give you enough space for all your dolls.’

Stiles rolled his eyes.

‘Actions figures.’ he corrected. ‘But yeah. All my stuff’s going to fit, for once.’

‘Cool.’ Scott grinned. ‘That means I can have the one in the corner.’

‘Yeah, Scotty.’ Stiles laughed. ‘I have no interest in your room of choice.’

‘Excellent.’ Scott fist pumped and then ran back out, galloping down the stairs like a herd of elephants.

‘It could get drafty up here.’ Noah was inspecting the room. ‘I knew there was an attic but we didn’t get a chance to look at it last time. I don’t know why the door was stuck. These old houses can be funny. You know, your great-great grandfather built it way back when he came to America from Poland. He used to farm.’

‘No kidding.’ Stiles said, wandering over to the side window. ‘You’ve never told me that before.’

‘I only found out when I went into town last weekend to get the keys.’ Noah replied. ‘The estate was being handled by a guy called David Whittemore. He gave me a bunch of papers and sent me to another guy who works at the historical society and is also apparently the authority on Beacon Hills.’

‘Yeah?’ Stiles swung under a beam. ‘Is he a thousand years old?’

‘No actually.’ Noah replied. ‘But he’s got an interesting story. His family apparently founded the town. They own most of the land in the preserve as well as having a house out there. Unfortunately there was a fire and...’

‘Shit, seriously?’ Stiles broke in. ‘Is he a Hale?’

Noah frowned and then his face cleared.

‘Of course.’ he said. ‘I should have known you’d been researching. Yes, he’s a Hale. He’s one of the four that survived the fire. His niece is actually one of my new deputies and I think the other two are both in high school.’

‘Oh my God.’ Stiles brain was reeling. ‘Do you think I could go ask him about mom’s family?’

‘I’m sure you could.’ Noah was smiling. ‘To be honest, I’m really happy you’re showing an interest.’

‘Well, it’s mom.’ Stiles replied. ‘And it’s not like we talk about her all that much.’

Now Noah’s face fell and Stiles wanted to kick himself. They’d been having an actual moment and of course, he’d gone and fucked it up.

‘Dad...’ he started but Noah just waved a hand and started walking away.

‘Come down and help when you’re done.’ he said and then he was gone and Stiles felt like shit all over again.

His shoulders slumped and he leaned his forehead against the beam.

‘Shit.’ He closed his eyes. ‘Every fucking time.’

They got the back of the SUV unpacked and everything stowed away. The furniture would be arriving the next day but they had camping mattresses to sleep on and the appliances in the kitchen were all working, as well as the hot water. By the time it got dark, Stiles was tired and wanted his space.

He took a long shower, pleased that the antique looking shower worked well. He let the hot water soak into his muscles and then retreated upstairs to the attic. Scott had already staked his claim in the corner bedroom, singing to himself off key as he unpacked his clothes.

Stiles set up his air mattress under the rear window, his boxes scattered around him and his duffle open with clothes spilling out. He sighed as he lay down, checking his phone for signal before he turned it off. He put one arm behind his head and looked up through the window, seeing the waxing gibbous. He’d left the window open, the late summer air fragrant and slightly chilly, and he found his thoughts drifting to the boy in the back yard and who he might be.

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Laura Hale pulled up in front of the old Hale farmhouse and turned off the ignition. She inhaled deeply, cracking her neck and stretching before she got out the car. It had been a long shift, eight till eight, and she was tired. The station was short staffed and she’d pulled two doubles in a row in addition to the day shift she’d just finished, although it was now closer to nine.

She trudged the few steps to the porch and climbed the stairs, going inside and shrugging off her jacket and unbuckling her utility belt. She set it down on the table in the hall and listened. Her ears picked up the sound of Cora texting in her bedroom and Peter humming to himself in the kitchen as he chopped vegetables. It was late for dinner and she smiled, knowing it was to accommodate here. After all, it wasn’t like her family could spoil themselves, not with their appetites.

Laura listened again and then frowned, missing the third member of her family.

‘I’m home.’ she called, knowing it was unnecessary because they would have heard the cruiser as soon as it hit the mile marker away from the house.

‘In here.’ Peter called back, equally unnecessary but part of the little ballet they performed each night. After the fire, seeming normal had become even more important and these little touches were what made them human.

He was making what looked like proper bolognese and Laura sniffed appreciatively. He’d always done most of the cooking, enjoying it immensely. It had been one of the things that had helped him get through the aftermath of the fire, cooking and providing and caring for the three children that had been orphaned (even if she’d been eighteen, Laura still appreciated that care) and in return having them rely on him had kept Peter sane.

‘Smells good.’ She came to stand next to him and Peter smiled and offered her the spoon. The sauce was rich and wholesome and she smacked her lips and then headed for the fridge for a beer. She didn’t bother with an opener, simply flicking the cap off with a claw.

‘Hey.’ Peter gave her a sidelong grin. ‘That’s cheating.’

‘It’s my den, Peter.’ Laura grinned back, showing a little fang. ‘If I can’t cheat here, where can I?’

Peter chuckled and kept stirring. Laura took a long pull of her beer and leaned against the counter.

'Where's Derek?' she asked and he shrugged.

'Brooding on the heath.' he replied. 'That's my guess.'

Laura sighed.

'I worry about him.' She went to sit at the table, unlacing her boots and kicking them off before removing her socks and stretching out her toes. Police issue boots were hell on her claws and she flicked them out, wriggling her toes luxuriously.

'He's nineteen, Laura.' Peter replied easily. 'He's supposed to be an emotional mess. The whole death of our pack notwithstanding.'

'I know.' Laura tuned in to Cora again, listening to the lightning speed at which she messaged. 'I just wish he was a bit more...social.'

'And I wish that you didn't worry so much.' Peter came to sit opposite her. 'Laura, he's fine. He's running around in the woods, terrorising the local wildlife. I was the same at his age.'

'Your family didn't get massacred by hunters at his age.' Laura replied. 'And he's had six years to get to grips with it. At the risk of sounding like a total bitch, we all had to deal. And ever since the fire, I can't take the risk of him doing something that would draw attention.'

'He'll be fine.' Peter said. 'Derek's a lot more sensible than you give him credit for. And at the risk of playing devil's advocate, he was thirteen when the fire happened. You were eighteen, and more equipped to handle it. Cora was ten and I'm grateful because she bounced a hell of a lot better than the rest of us did.'

'I know.' Laura grouched and scratched the label off her beer. 'On a different note, the new Sheriff moved into town today. I saw him drive past the station earlier.'

'He seems like a good man.' Peter got up and checked the pasta boiling on the stove before opening the oven and taking out four loaves of garlic bread wrapped in foil. They would easily devour one each with dinner. 'I like him.'

'Me too.' Laura replied. 'I hope he sticks around.'

'Have you met the rest of the family?' Peter asked.

'Not yet.' Laura replied. 'I know he's got a son.'

'Claudia's son?' Peter's face changed and Laura knew he was thinking.

'I doubt he's like her.' she said. 'Mom would have known.'

'Yeah.' Peter looked out the window. 'Your brother's home.'

Laura was a little startled. Her senses were superlative but Derek had the ability to move so silently that nobody could track him. She looked towards the back door as it opened and he came in, head down and looking the very image of a teenage creeper. He barely acknowledged them, taking off the leather jacket that had belonged to their father and hanging it up before heading for the back stairs without a word.

'Good evening to you too!' Laura yelled after him and then slumped down in her seat. 'I swear to God.'

'Patience is a virtue, Alpha.' Peter smirked and she growled at him, listening to Derek stomp up the stairs.

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At the top of the landing, Derek paused and then backtracked and leaned in Cora's open doorway. She was on her bed on her stomach and she didn't so much as lift her head.

'Isaac was looking for you.' she said by way of greeting. 'I told him you were out jacking off in the woods or whatever the hell you do out there.'

'Thanks.' Derek drawled. 'I'm sure he found that riveting.'

'You need to carry your fucking phone.' Now she did look up, her dark eyes just like their mother's. He and Laura had their father's eyes, green hazel that changed colour constantly depending on the light although his were paler. They were all dark haired and had the trademark Hale eyebrows and good looks. Peter was close enough in looks that he could be mistaken for a parent by strangers although his blue eyes had come from Mattie Hale, their maternal grandmother.

'You need to mind your own fucking business.' he replied and she bared her teeth at him.

'Whatever.' she snorted. 'Did this little visit have an actual point or are you just getting in some asshole practice?'

'It did.' Derek replied. 'But you're being a bitch so I'm not going to tell you.'

'Blow me.' Cora gave him the finger, but Derek could smell she was interested.

'Nah. I think that's Isaac's job.' He turned and started down the landing and heard her get up off the bed in a hurry. He ran the rest of the way to the stairs leading up to the attic and dropped to all fours to bound the rest of the way up. Cora was slower and he was ready for her when she came leaping through his bedroom door. Derek pounced, and they rolled across the floor clawing and snarling and trying to bite each other as they roughhoused. He finally got Cora in a headlock and held her while she raged and stabbed him with her claws.

'Let me up, asshole!' Her eyes were gold. 'Laura!'

'Nope.' Laura said from the kitchen. 'You two want to act like cubs, you can sort it out yourselves.'

'See.' Derek twisted them so they collapsed on his bed, a king mattress set on a bunch of wooden pallets on the bare floorboards. 'You're up shit creek, pup.'

'Don't call me pup!' Cora wriggled free. 'Now you going to tell me or not?'

'Fine.' Derek flopped onto his back. 'The new Sheriff moved into the Gajos house. He's got two kids, like high school age.'

'Poor them.' Cora snickered, laying her head on his stomach. 'Bet they're thrilled to have moved to this shithole.'

Derek kept quiet, thinking about the boy he'd seen at the window. He'd looked like shit if Derek was being honest, the shadows under his eyes and his skin pasty under a scattering of moles that were stark against his skin like droplets of ink. He'd had dark messy hair and a red hoodie and for a crazy moment, Derek had wanted to laugh at the symbolism. Not that the boy would be aware that

he had real live wolves running around the woods his home was in. Nobody did, not since Aneta Gajos had died. Okay, there was still Deaton, but apart from him there was nobody else who even suspected what the Hales were, especially with how tightly Laura made them keep things under wraps.

Derek was more than okay with that.

'Hey.' Cora lifted her head. 'Seriously, are you okay?'

'Mostly.' Derek couldn't outright lie but he could hedge. 'Just thinking about school next week.'

'Ugh, don't remind me.' Cora sat up. 'A sixteen year old freshman? It's so lame.'

'No more than a nineteen year old senior.' Derek made a face. He and Cora had both been taken out of school for a year after the fire. Ostensibly it was for therapy but in truth it was to relearn control. Talia had been their alpha and their anchor and it had hit them hard that first moon. The therapy had been courtesy of Deaton's sister Marin, the emissary for an allied pack the next state over and a qualified psychologist. She'd helped a lot but Derek was still dealing with the demons he'd kept well hidden. His pack knew what had happened according to the police and he'd never really told the entire truth of what had happened. Marin had spoken at length about being a survivor and how he wasn't responsible for the fire but Derek knew different and he'd carried it alone, the guilt and shame and fear making him mistrustful of anyone apart from his pack.

'You've got Erica and Boyd and Isaac though.' Cora said, moving to sit next to him and rest her head on his shoulder. 'And me, if you want to associate with a freshman.'

'Yeah.' Derek dropped a kiss on her shiny dark hair. 'I know.'

'Cool.' Cora bounced up and held out a hand to pull him to his feet. 'Come on, let's go eat before Peter steals it all.'

'I'll be down soon.' Derek forced a smile.

Cora didn't reply but the look she gave him was enough. She left and Derek fell back on the bed and stared at the eaves. He was dreading school. He was lucky he was smart and could cruise most of his classes. The only thing he really took seriously was languages. Not even the captaincy of the basketball team was enough to turn him back into the cocky happy go lucky cub he'd been before *her*. He wasn't interested in girls anymore but the boys held nothing for him either and it would make him feel sick to his stomach to feel their eyes on him. He knew the way he looked, knew why Kate had chosen him, and he wanted no part of it.

He thought about the boy at the window again, recalled the hint of his scent that had drifted down - sweat tainted with chemicals, anxiety and a deep seated sadness that Derek recognised all too well. Overlaying it though had been curiosity and that had been light and green and that was what he thought about as he got up and went downstairs.

Chapter 2

Stiles hadn't realised how used he was to noise when there wasn't any. He lay awake for hours, listening to the sound of his own breathing and the alarmingly loud creaks of the house. Sleeping in the attic wasn't half as romantic as it sounded when you were only able to go to sleep to the soundtrack of all night traffic and sirens that you found in the city and he shifted into many positions until he finally started to drop off at sometime after three.

He'd only just started to drift when he heard it.

Stiles' eyes flew open and he sat bolt upright, his breathing coming quick and fast. At first he thought he'd imagined it, but then it sounded again and before he knew what he was doing, Stiles was scrambling off his air mattress (not an easy feat so he resorted to rolling) and was at the window in no time. He peered out into the night, the almost full moon providing a surprising amount of light, and listened. A delighted grin spread across his face when he heard it one more time and he almost bounced in excitement when he realised what he was hearing. Suddenly living in the middle of nowhere seemed a lot more appealing, especially if he had wolves to chase after.

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'Nice.' Cora laughed as Derek's howl died away. 'I think they heard that one all the way to town.'

Derek grinned and leaned back on his hands. This was something they'd done as cubs, when their parents had held them in their laps on the roof and they'd watched the moon and howled to their hearts' content. The farmhouse was even further back in the preserve, built long before the house they'd been born in was to become the Hale homestead, and it was well hidden among the trees. Nobody came out that far, the closest neighbour being the Gajos house that was now inhabited by the newly arrived sheriff and his family.

There was a noise behind them and they both turned to see Peter leaning out of the dormer window. He grinned and climbed out, walking along the roof as confident as a cat until he could sit down between them.

'You're going to wake Laura.' he admonished. 'And you know what she's like if she doesn't get her sleep. Feral doesn't even cover it.'

'She sleeps like a log.' Cora grumbled. 'And we're just having some fun.'

'I know.' Peter put an arm around her and she leaned into him. His scent was a comfort to them, elements of Talia's winding through it in the way siblings' scents were always similar. Derek knew Cora, Laura and him must smell the same to other wolves, even if they were distinct to each other. 'I have to go into the shop tomorrow. You want to come help me out, Derek? I have a shipment I need to unpack and catalogue.'

'Okay.' Derek agreed willingly. The bookshop was a welcome sanctuary from the real world of school and the rest of the town, who still looked at him sideways when he walked past. No *that poor boy whose little girlfriend got killed* or *that poor boy whose whole family got burned alive in their own house*.

He didn't include all the whispers of *maybe it was him*.

Derek wasn't stupid and he was also a werewolf. He had ears and he used them. So yes, the bookshop was good. It meant earning spending money, time to hide in the back room and sort

books and a whole day away from prying eyes.

'Ick.' Cora grinned at them. 'I really don't see the appeal of standing around messing with a bunch of creepy old books.'

'And that is why your brother is going to be valedictorian and you are not.' Peter told her and she gave him the finger. He gasped theatrically and clutched at his chest. 'How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child.'

'Except I'm not your child.' she corrected and he rolled his eyes at her. Derek hid a smile. The Hale family eye roll was legendary.

'Maybe not the direct fruit of my loins.' He stuck his nose in her hair. 'But close enough, cub.'

'You're so gross.' Cora muttered but she accepted the embrace and Derek felt a surge of protectiveness. She wasn't his baby sister anymore but he would die rather than let anyone hurt her again.

They went back inside and Derek retreated to the attic. He undressed and lay down on top of the covers. It was still warm and he enjoyed the feeling as he shifted, the draft of air coming from the window ruffling his fur. He did his usual sweep of the house, listening for the three heartbeats below him before dropping off into a thankfully dreamless sleep.

Stiles' eyes popped open of their own accord, something they hadn't done in a very long time. He blinked to clear his vision a few times, then rolled over. The air mattress had thankfully held out during the night and he managed to sit up, looking at the window. There was light streaming through, making dappled patterns on the worn boards and lighting up the dust motes floating thick in the air.

'Huh.' Stiles made a face. 'Guess I may have to clean a little.'

He swiped his hand through the air a couple of times and then got up, ignoring the tortured noises the mattress made, and stumbled to the window. He leaned out and breathed in a couple of times, feeling the air fill his lungs. There was a clean crisp scent in the air and Stiles grinned and came back in. He grabbed some clothes and underwear from his bag and made his way to the bathroom downstairs. The rest of the house was still sleeping by the sound of things so he showered and dressed and went down to the kitchen, his stomach growling.

Toast and peanut butter made a decent enough breakfast and Stiles went out onto the back porch to eat it. He ventured into the yard, taking care to navigate the overgrown lawn with care. Scott had stepped on a stray nail the day before and howled until Melissa had pried it out and cleaned it up. He'd hopped around the rest of the night, prompting snorts from Stiles at how ridiculous he looked. It did mean though that Scott would probably not want to go out to explore, so Stiles decided to do it himself. After all, they'd already seen the town.

He was washing up his plate and glass when Noah came in, dressed in a threadbare t-shirt and his sleep shorts, scratching at the greying stubble along his jaw. He looked surprised at the fact that Stiles was not only up before noon, but dressed and ready to rock and roll.

'You're up early.' he remarked and Stiles bit back his usual sarcasm and shrugged.

'Figured new town, new start.' He glanced at Noah, noting the looking of astonishment and trying not to feel hurt by it. 'And you said I should get a job after school so I figured I'd go out. Maybe

have a look and do some exploring?’

‘Good idea.’ Noah poured himself a glass of milk and Stiles felt a twinge. That used to be their thing, a glass of chocolate milk with breakfast on the weekends but then his mom had died and the chocolate milk changed to half and half and that had been that.

‘Any ideas where to start?’ he asked and Noah shrugged.

‘Ask around.’ he said. ‘There’s bound to be somewhere.’

Derek sat slumped in the passenger seat of Peter’s car and played on his phone. He was only half listening to Peter, who was talking hands free to one of his connections. They were discussing a shipment that was coming from Bulgaria the next week and Derek tuned in for the interesting bits. Peter had always been the one to show an interest in the family business, started three generations before by Derek’s great-great grandmother. She’d been like Peter, touched by the magic that wolves sometimes carried, and her collection of occult books had been extensive. Thankfully Peter had moved a large number of them into the basement of the bookshop, stored carefully under archival conditions and kept extremely secure, so they had survived the fire. Those that hadn’t he was still trying to replace and that was why he’d gone on with the business. Derek loved the shop, loved the way it smelled and the dark corners and the old wooden shelves. There was a wonderful spot at the top of the spiral staircase that led to the mezzanine and an apartment that was filled with books at the moment but which he hoped could be his once he graduated and started his online degree in Library Science. He didn’t want to leave Beacon Hills or his pack, even if the idea of going somewhere and having no-one know who he was sounded tempting. Maybe once upon a time he’d wanted to strike out on his own, go to a real college and play basketball and fall in love and sleep with random people at keggers where he’d get drunk enough not to care about anything.

Not anymore. Now his only concern was to make amends for what he’d done and that meant staying where he could protect his pack.

‘Hey.’ Peter’s voice broke through his thoughts. ‘You awake over there?’

‘Yeah.’ He sat up. ‘Just thinking.’

Peter gave him a sidelong glance but stayed silent. He knew well enough when to pry and when to give Derek his space. They stayed like that all the way into town and to the bookshop. Peter parked around the back and Derek followed him in through the back door, breathing easier when he inhaled the smell of books and Peter’s cologne that lingered in the air. There was something else as well, something that spoke to the most animal part of his brain, the scent of years and years of Hales that the very walls seemed steeped in.

He took off his jacket and hung it up on the coat hook behind the long polished wooden counter. He brushed his fingers over the leather, leaning in to scent it briefly while Peter was busy in the back. It had been six years already and James Hale’s scent had long since faded from the lining but Derek liked to close his eyes and pretend he could still smell his father on it. James had been a bitten wolf, turned when he and Talia had mated, and his scent had always been a little bit different. Derek could smell the same delicate undertone of human on Isaac and Erica and Boyd and he smiled and gave the jacket one last loving stroke. He heard Peter’s phone ring in the back and moved to get the till ready for the day. They had a devoted core of customers from beacon Hills and surrounding towns who appreciated rare and antique books and were surprisingly busy.

‘Delivery is on its way.’ Peter came into the shop, going to hang up his own jacket next to Derek’s.

He'd once joked that the Hales looked like a motorcycle gang, all having an odd affectation for leather jackets. Laura had carried the tradition forward, the family joke enduring when she'd bought her three bitten betas their own leather jackets that they all wore with pride. The other kids at school gave them all a wide berth and called them the Wolf Pack (and God how Erica cackled at that one. Derek wasn't unconvinced that she hadn't been the one to start that little nickname) but that suited him just fine.

He made a noncommittal noise and kept doing what he needed to do. He was good with money and accounts, in fact Peter had handed the whole thing over to him sophomore year, and the slide of notes and coin through his fingers was soothing.

Peter made a couple of calls and then got twitchy.

'I need coffee and at least four danishes.' he announced. 'You want your usual?'

'Yeah.' Derek said without really looking at him. Peter thankfully never got offended and simply grabbed his jacket off the hook and left through the now unlocked front door, the bell tinkling merrily on his way out.

Stiles had expected pickings to be slim in a small town, but he'd been to at least three convenience stores and a couple of smaller speciality places to ask about jobs and been turned away. Now he was idly driving through the older, shabbier part of downtown and simply taking in the lay of the land.

He noticed the man coming out of what looked like a bookstore but didn't clock the name until he had driven past. When he did, Stiles slammed on the brakes and reversed until he could pull into a spot right outside the shop. He sat there for a couple of minutes, his heart racing. He honestly hadn't expected it to be this easy to find them but here they were in plain sight.

He turned off the engine and got out, looking up at the sign. It was dark blue, the gold lettering declaring the shop as Hale's faded by time. The windows were curtained in the same dark blue, artfully draped so that Stiles just knew it would be perfectly gloomy inside.

The first step towards the door took him right to the threshold. Stiles placed a palm against the glass and pushed and there was a gentle tinkling as he stepped inside. Just as he suspected, the light inside was shadowy and soft and every wall was lined with bookcases. Just in front of him was a polished wooden counter but there was no-one to be seen and Stiles came in further.

'Hello?' he called. 'Anyone here?'

There was the sound of something thumping to the floor and a soft muttered profanity and Stiles grinned because it sounded like something he would do. He came right up to the counter and saw the door behind was ajar, probably leading to a back room or office. A shadow moved past it and he snickered.

'So maybe it's just me, but I thought shop assistants had to, you know, assist.' he said and then startled as something close to a growl came from behind the door. Maybe the man didn't need to have someone attend the shop because he had a big fuck off dog instead. But then the shadow moved again and came closer to the door and Stiles saw that it was definitely moving on two feet.

'You're not funny.' The voice was light and higher pitched than he'd been expecting. Stiles grinned madly and leaned on the counter.

‘Actually I think I’m hilarious.’ he replied. ‘Are you like chronically shy or something?’

‘Or something.’ The voice was dry. ‘You buying or just coming in to be annoying?’

‘Dude.’ Stiles was delighted. ‘I’m actually looking for the guy who runs this place.’

‘Peter?’ There was definitely curiosity now. ‘Why?’

‘He talked to my dad last week.’ Stiles was on tiptoe, trying to see around the door. ‘He told him about our house. He knew my babcia, I mean my grandma.’

There was another thump.

‘Shit.’ the voice said under its breath. ‘You’re the new sheriff’s son?’

‘That’s me.’ Stiles replied. ‘I’m Stiles. Stiles Stilinski.’

‘Stilinski.’ the voice replied. ‘Not Gajos.’

‘No.’ Stiles frowned. ‘That was my mom. Hey, you want to come out? It’s kind of weird having a conversation and not seeing who I’m talking to.’

There was silence and then the door creaked. The shadow moved and Stiles drew in a startled breath when the person behind it came into the shop.

‘You.’ he said, and it sounded slightly accusatory. Thankfully it countered the fact that Stiles heart took off a mile a minute because the boy from the fence the day before was not so much a boy as a young man and one that was incredibly hot. He was tall and shouldery and his inky black hair set off tanned skin and eyes that seemed to shimmer and change colour from green to grey to hazel as he moved through the dim light.

‘You.’ He seemed less surprised to see Stiles but no less accusatory. In fact, he actually sounded a little pissed but Stiles wasn’t going to let that get in the way.

‘Why the hell were you at our back fence yesterday?’ he demanded and the boy’s face changed so he actually looked somewhat sheepish. He glanced away, the tips of his ears going red.

‘I was curious.’ He folded his arms, the defensive pose only adding to the whole mystique thing he had going on. ‘I heard someone had moved in.’

‘So you came to spy on us?’ Stiles raised an eyebrow at him. ‘Dude, that’s like serious creeper territory.’

‘Okay then.’ The boy’s thick dark brows drew down and he glared at Stiles. ‘So why the hell are you here? Or is turning up in our shop a complete coincidence?’

‘Our shop?’ Stiles grinned. ‘So you’re a Hale?’

At that the boy’s face shut down.

‘Look, if you’re one of those morbid assholes that just wants to get a look at the Hales, then you can fuck off.’ he spat and Stiles recoiled at the venom in his voice.

‘Dude.’ He held up both hands. ‘Just slow your roll, okay. I wasn’t lying when I said I’m actually looking for Peter Hale. He’s the one who spoke to my dad and he’s the one who told him about my mom. So you can back right the fuck up.’

He frowned when the boy shut his mouth and tilted his head ever so slightly. There was something oddly canine about the gesture and the flaring nostrils didn't help. If Stiles hadn't known better, he would have sworn the boy was sniffing the air. Eventually he seemed mollified and folded his arms. Stiles had to make a serious effort not to gape at the way his biceps flexed under the black henley he wore.

'He's not here,' he replied, green eyes still wary. 'He went out to get coffee.'

Stiles opened his mouth to reply and the front doorbell tinkled behind him.

'And now he's back.' The voice came from the man he'd seen leaving the shop. He was middle aged and undeniably handsome and Stiles wondered if all the Hales had looked like off duty runway models. He came into the shop, carrying a paper bag that smelt like heaven and a cardboard tray with three coffees in it. 'You're young Mr Stilinski, aren't you?'

'Uh, yeah,' Stiles said, bemused. 'How did you know?'

'You look like Claudia,' the man replied. 'I'm Peter Hale. I went to school with your mom.'

'Really?' Stiles' heart gave an excited little jump.

'I did.' Peter smiled and it was sharp, his perfect teeth almost blindingly white. He seemed like he'd more at home in LA in his perfectly faded jeans and very low cut white v-neck and Stiles fidgeted under his direct gaze. 'Now, I happen to have a bag of very good apple danishes from Clarice's down the road. You must tell your dad about her shop, she makes pastries that are to die for. I also happen to have three coffees. How about you join Derek and I and we can chat about why you're here.'

Stiles was thrown off guard at that and glanced at the other boy, now identified as Derek Hale. He was looking rather stormy, his green eyes narrowed.

'I think I'll take mine in back,' he said. 'I have work to do.'

'Suit yourself.' Peter's smile widened and Stiles couldn't help noticing that it was a little menacing. 'I'm perfectly capable of entertaining our guest by myself.'

Derek opened his mouth as if to say something and then snapped it shut.

'Give me my danishes,' he said, voice flat, and Peter handed the bag over, along with one of the coffees. Derek took two and grabbed his coffee before disappearing back into the doorway behind the counter. Stiles turned to Peter and gave him a questioning look.

'Was it something I said?' he asked and Peter laughed and handed him the third cup.

'Derek's not really properly socialised,' he replied. 'You'll get used to him.' He gestured to a small round table in the back corner, flanked by two comfortable looking armchairs. 'Would you like to sit down?'

'Sure.' Stiles went to sit. Peter took the chair opposite and ripped the bag open, exposing the rest of the danishes. He nodded at them and Stiles took one, biting into it tentatively and then having to stifle a moan.

'Good aren't they?' Peter grinned. 'If I let Derek have his way, he'd demolish the entire bag by himself. You growing boys and your appetites.'

There was another thump from the back and Stiles glanced over Peter's shoulder.

'Is he throwing books around back there?' he asked and Peter laughed.

'No.' He seemed impossibly amused, his bright blue eyes twinkling merrily. 'Derek's just clumsy.' He tilted his head the exact same way Derek had and then laughed again. 'In fact, it's one of his most endearing qualities.'

'Okay, if you say so.' Stiles jammed the rest of the danish in his mouth, licking icing sugar off his fingers. 'So you knew my mom?'

'I knew her very well.' Peter replied. 'She was actually my date to senior prom.'

'No shit.' Stiles blurted and then cut himself off. 'I mean...'

'It's fine, Stiles.' Peter handed him one of the paper napkins he'd brought in with the coffees. 'Believe me when I say that bad language is a mainstay of the Hale household. I also have two nieces and between them, they could make a sailor blush.'

'Cool.' Stiles looked towards the door at the back and wondered if Derek was listening in. 'So you and her...?' He let the question hang and Peter threw back his head and positively guffawed.

'Oh Stiles.' He chuckled and offered him another danish. 'Do I look in any way straight to you?'

'Uh.' Stiles' eyes widened. 'Not really?'

'Exactly.' Peter said, taking his own danish and ripping into it with relish. He chewed and swallowed and waved his hand at himself. 'I am Beacon Hill's most eligible gay bachelor. It's the only reason I get away with saying all the shit I do.'

'That's cool.' Stiles relaxed a little. 'I mean, I'm not exactly straight myself. I'm kind of an equal opportunities player, if you get me.'

'I assumed as much.' Peter nodded at his clothing. 'I'm making a very stereotypical plaid based deduction of course.'

'Well they say you're either a leather jacket bi or a plaid flannel bi.' Stiles attempted levity and then his eyes fell on the leather jacket hanging up behind the counter and his stomach turned over at the idea of the moody teenager in the back being the same as him.

'Oh, of course.' Peter grinned over his coffee. 'I'm assuming that you know your mom was.'

'No.' Stiles nearly dropped his coffee in his lap. 'She was?'

'Yes.' Peter smiled. 'We ran the school LGBT association. Of course in those days, we were dismissed as being militant and a general pain in the ass of the administration but thankfully both of us were so bitchy, nobody dared say anything. Not to mention that fact that Mattie and Aneta were forces to be reckoned with and if the school board had even thought about shutting us down, they would have had to take them both on.'

'Okay so I know Aneta was my grandmother.' Stiles said. 'But Mattie?'

'Derek's grandmother and my mother.' Peter said, licking at the sugar left at the corner of his mouth. 'She and your grandma were best friends. In fact, the Gajos family and the Hale family have always been friends.'

‘Wow.’ Stiles beamed at him. ‘I had no idea. She never told me.’

‘Maybe she was waiting to.’ Peter’s smile became a little stilted. ‘I’m sorry she died. We heard about it from Aneta.’

‘It was fronto-temporal dementia.’ Stiles said, feeling his good feelings ebb away as he thought about her. ‘I was ten.’

Peter was watching thoughtfully.

‘Is that why you came here today?’ he asked. ‘To find out about her. I gave your dad a few hints but I think it’s more a story for you, am I right?’

‘He’s married now.’ Stiles didn’t want to sound as bitter as he did but he couldn’t help it. ‘We don’t talk about her. He told me that he’d spoken to you and that you knew her and I just wanted to have a conversation where I didn’t feel like shit for asking.’

‘I can understand that.’ Peter said gravely. ‘And I know what it’s like to lose your family.’ He sat back, tapping his forefinger against his mouth. ‘How about this. It just so happens that I’m in the market for an assistant. Your father mentioned that you and your step-brother would be looking for after school jobs to help out and I think you’d be a good fit here.’

Stiles inhaled sharply and then heard the sound of frantic coughing from the back.

‘But doesn’t Derek already work here?’ he asked and Peter nodded.

‘He does. But next week is the beginning of the new school year and he’ll be at basketball practice three times a week. You can come on those days and the weekend. I always have new shipments coming in so there’s plenty of work for both of you. I also get the feeling that you enjoy research and in my position of Beacon Hill’s unofficial historian, I think you’ll probably be happier sitting in front of a computer than Derek is.’

‘Yeah.’ Stiles grinned. ‘Not to brag, but my google-fu is pretty awesome. And the history thing is something I’d be really interested in.’

‘Excellent.’ Peter looked pleased. ‘Then I’ll see you on Monday afternoon. You can have the weekend to settle in and find your way around town. I noticed that you’re driving your mom’s Jeep.’

‘Yeah.’ Stiles smiled. ‘She left it to me for when I was older. Roscoe’s a bit temperamental but he gets me where I need to go.’

‘God.’ Peter chuckled. ‘If that car could talk. You know how proud she was when she finally saved enough to buy him? We used to go everywhere and every time Roscoe broke down, I’d be the asshole that had to help her fix him. And I’m about as mechanically minded as Liberace was.’

‘This is amazing.’ Stiles felt warm inside. ‘I swear it’s like there’s this whole other life she had that I know nothing about.’

‘Stiles.’ Peter leaned forward and for just a second it looked like his eyes caught the light and tinged gold. ‘You really have no idea.’

Behind the door Derek fumed. The last thing he wanted was an interloper coming into his territory

and taking up space when he wasn't wanted. Not only that, but this particular interloper was throwing his instincts off so badly, he was struggling to keep himself from shifting. He'd caught a hint of Stiles's scent in the garden the day before but when he'd walking into the shop it had been like a brick to the face.

Derek hadn't ever smelt anything like it before. Even Paige hadn't smelt as good to his wolf nose and she'd been like breathing in liquid chocolate. Stiles was sharp notes and electricity and zingy citrus and it had blown Derek away the second he'd scented him. He'd been so badly unsettled that he'd been curt and rude and instead of being offended, Stiles had grinned at him and his scent had coloured with equal parts interest and amusement. It also didn't help that he looked like a walking wet dream with his piercings and tattoos (and who even had that many tattoos at his age?) contrasted with an adorably snub nose and the most perfect mottling of moles across his pale skin. He was every bit Derek's type (or what his type would have certainly evolved into if not for her) and it was playing merry havoc with Derek's hormones.

And now Peter had offered him a job of all things and was telling him all these stories about Stiles' mom and Derek knew that he'd known Claudia Gajos and been friends with her, but he'd never met her and he was jealous because it sounded like she and Peter had had the same relationship he and Paige would have eventually had if she hadn't been murdered. Everyone had thought they were dating, but they'd only been thirteen when she'd died and best friends and Derek had no doubt that he would have eventually gotten to the point where he was comfortable saying that he preferred guys like she would have with girls and they would have been attached at the hip and causing chaos.

Instead he got to go sit by her grave every year on her birthday and hate himself a little bit more for what happened.

He heard the doorbell go and realised that Stiles was leaving. He waited for the door to shut before emerging and saw Peter watching the Jeep pull away out the window. He glanced at Derek over his shoulder and grinned at him.

'He's nice.' he said. 'And smart. And fucking adorable.'

'Shut up.' Derek muttered and made himself busy, praying Peter would just let it go. He came over the counter and leaned one elbow on it and Derek braced himself.

'I think he likes you.' he said. 'He kept staring at the door after you left and every time I said your name, his heart rate jumped.'

'I don't need a matchmaker, Peter.' Derek growled. 'I'm perfectly happy.'

'Bullshit.' Peter snorted. 'You think we don't all know how withdrawn you are, how you shy away from everyone? You don't even bond with the pack the way you should and you're so fucking jumpy all the time.'

'I like my space.' Derek huffed but he knew it was just a front. The truth was he was incredibly lonely and nothing, not his pack, not basketball, not anything had been able to make him not be lonely.

'I know that.' Peter's voice gentled. 'But you're a wolf, Derek. Sooner or later, all this isolation is going to have serious consequences.'

Derek's stomach lurched, the guilt thick in his throat. He kept quiet, didn't give any hint that he'd already caused so much damage because he'd ignored his instincts. He knew it was wrong, could

feel the way the wolf took over every full moon to the point where he might become feral but he couldn't take the chance of becoming close to anyone ever again. If that meant he'd lose himself and never come out of the woods again, well Derek could live with that.

'I'm fine.' he said and Peter thankfully didn't call him on the lie. Instead he rapped his knuckles on the counter.

'He starts Monday.' he said. 'Be nice.'

Derek bared his teeth at him but didn't argue. Peter could be even more stubborn than he was and if he felt Derek was being difficult he'd just enlist Laura's help and that was the last thing Derek wanted.

Chapter 3

Stiles decided that he was going to ride the wave of good luck that had seen him find Peter Hale and get a job all in one morning and so he drove around town, familiarising himself with the street names and finally ending up outside a gorgeous red brick building with mullioned windows that declared itself the Beacon Hills Public Library.

He found a parking space and went inside, the distinctive smell of books not quite the same as it had been in the Hale shop. Stiles gave that brief consideration as he wandered the stacks, finally turning a corner and nearly running into a very beautiful young woman. He flailed and stepped back, twisting around to grab the shelf behind him in an effort to not knock her off her feet, a distinct possibility seeing as how tiny she was.

‘Sorry.’ He righted himself and gave her a sheepish smile. She really was lovely with thick copper braids twisted around her head and sparkling dark green eyes, set off by perfectly painted scarlet lips and dressed in whimsical florals, her floaty summer dress showing off slender pale legs and cowboy boots that matched her lips.

‘That’s alright.’ She raised an eyebrow at him. ‘You’re new.’

‘Yeah.’ Stiles tilted his head and it was his turn to raise his eyebrows when he read the titles in her arms. ‘Wow, doing a little light reading there? Just looking at those titles is making my head hurt.’

‘What can I say?’ The woman’s lips curved in a teasing smile. ‘I like puzzles.’

‘I bet.’ Stiles was ready to move on, but she moved to block his path.

‘I’m Lydia Martin.’ she said and held out one dainty hand, balancing the stack of books like a pro. ‘Current front runner for Valedictorian and future Field’s Medal winner.’

‘Stiles Stilinski.’ Stiles shook the offered hand and grinned. ‘Pretty smart on a good day and recently arrived from San Francisco.’

‘That part I know.’ Lydia said. ‘I’m dating one of your dad’s deputies so I’ve heard all about you moving here.’

‘Oh?’ Stiles was not as surprised as he should have been. Lydia was obviously a senior and her sophisticated dress sense screamed someone who’d be with an older guy. ‘Which one?’

‘Laura Hale.’ Lydia smirked at him when Stiles’ mouth fell open.

‘Oh.’ He shuffled a little. ‘Sorry, that sounds kind of judgemental. Not that I am, I’m kind of hella bi myself. It’s just...’

‘High femme is a thing.’ Lydia said primly, but her eyes were still sparkling at him. ‘And you of all people probably know the value of not being judged by the way you look.’ She gave his tattoos and piercings a pointed look. ‘You’re going to have fun on Monday. I hope you have long sleeves.’

‘Yeah.’ Stiles sighed. ‘I’m not exactly small town material.’

‘No.’ Lydia tilted her head and regarded him. ‘But it’s going to be very interesting seeing how you kick this town up its ass. And if anyone messes with you, you just come find me and I’ll deal with them. Now if you’d like a welcome to Beacon Hills recommendation, the mythology section is

down there.'

She nodded towards the back shelves then gave him a brilliant smile and moved past him, fluttering her fingers over her shoulder in a little wave as she left him there gawking at her.

'Hell,' he finally muttered to himself. 'I think I just made a friend.'

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Laura stopped at the shop on her way back to the station after a routine call to check in and see how her pack was doing. Cora was with Erica, shopping for school supplies and had declined an offer to get lunch so Laura had come armed with subs and sodas.

She found Peter humming to himself as he entered his new arrivals in his logbook. He was still so oddly old fashioned in some ways, preferring all his records to be on paper as well as in the database on his shiny Macbook.

'Hi.' She set the bag down. 'You smell pleased.'

'I am pleased.' Peter grinned at her. 'We had a visitor.'

Laura frowned and then scented the air, picking out the scent and sneezing violently.

'Oh my God.' Her eyes went wide. 'Is that...?'

'Answers your question, doesn't it?' Peter replied. 'He absolutely reeks of it.'

'But how did we not know?' Laura frowned. 'I mean, I don't even remember Mom ever talking about him. Claudia just left and got married and that was that.'

'I know.' Peter said. 'It's very odd.. But then again, I never understood why she never even came back to visit after she moved to San Francisco either. I think I can count the number of times we spoke on one hand. And then she died and I just...' He shrugged helplessly and Laura nodded in sympathy.

'Hmmm.' She dug out her sub and cracked open a soda. 'Where's Derek?'

'I sent him down to the post office to send off a delivery.' Peter helped himself and now his smile turned wicked. 'That's the other thing.'

'Oh don't tell me.' Laura cackled. 'Is it love at first sight?'

'More like love at first snark.' Peter chuckled. 'He hid in the back room the entire time Stiles was here and he's been grouchy ever since. That in itself is pretty normal for your brother, but the way he smells? Let's just say, teenage hormones are at work.'

'Oh thank God.' Laura bit deep and spoke with her mouth full. She felt no shame, after all wolves had terrible dining habits. 'I thought he'd never find anyone he'd be interested in.'

'And he's not alone.' Peter was being more polite about attacking his sub, but only marginally. 'That little Stilinski boy left here with heart eyes.'

'I worry about him.' Laura became sober. 'He's a good kid and I remember what he used to be like but then he hit puberty and just turned into this surly little asshole and he's only gotten worse since the fire.' She felt guilty, always did where Derek was concerned. The fire hit them all like a ton of bricks but Derek seemed to have taken the brunt of it.

They finished off their lunch and Laura was about to leave when the door tinkled and in walked a sight for sore eyes.

‘Hi.’ Lydia’s ruby smile never failed to make her heart start racing. Laura leaned back against the counter and gave her an answering smirk.

‘You look like a really hot milkmaid.’ she said, nodding at Lydia’s braids.

‘Flirt.’ Lydia stuck her adorable nose in the air and moved last her to the counter. ‘Hi Peter. Did it come in?’

‘It did.’ Peter reached under the counter and drew out a book wrapped in cloth. He gently revealed it and Lydia’s eyes flickered white. She gently traced the engraved cover. ‘It’s beautiful.’

‘It’s also seven hundred dollars.’ Peter grinned and happily accepted her credit card. ‘Doesn’t your father ever question why you spend so much money here?’

‘Not like he cares.’ Lydia snorted. ‘So I ran into someone interesting at the library.’ She fluttered her sooty eyelashes at Laura. ‘It seems our new Sheriff has a Spark for a son.’

‘No stranger than a banshee or a pack of werewolves.’ Peter countered. ‘Did you say hello?’

‘I did.’ Lydia turned serious. ‘Aneta was the only one who knew what was wrong with me when I had my little incident last year. The least I can do is look out for her grandson. I even volunteered to be his mentor on Monday. He’s more than likely going to get shit from people for being her grandson and let’s face it, he looks like the kind of person who’s just asking to be given detention.’

She made a face and Laura leaned into her. Everyone knew about Lydia going off the rails in her junior year when she was still pretending to be someone she wasn’t and ending up taking a naked three day stroll through the preserve where she was finally tracked down by Laura and the pack. It had been the start of their relationship and Lydia’s formal induction into the supernatural. Aneta Gajos hadn’t been a spark but she had been a powerful witch and she’d guided Lydia’s first steps into her power. It had been the only thing that had gotten Lydia through the rest of the semester because everyone at school had pretty much dropped her on account of her ‘odd behaviour’.

Now, while she no longer was Beacon High’s resident queen bee, Lydia did command respect. She’d abandoned any pretence of being pretty and dim and wore her genius with pride. The pack also liked and accepted her, even if she wasn’t a wolf. Derek and her had their academic rivalry going on, both of them so fiercely competitive. The difference was that Derek would not be going to some cross country college. Lydia, on the other hand, made no secret of her ambition, something that Peter definitely appreciated and encouraged in her. Laura found it incredibly attractive and Lydia’s amazing brain was one of the reasons she’d fallen for her so hard.

‘So what is it?’ she asked and Lydia held up the book so she could see the title, written in Latin of course.

‘It’s a spell book that belonged to a fifteenth century magician from Venice.’ she replied and Laura’s eyes glazed over. She’d been born without a magical bone in her body, werewolf magic aside, and she found it all a little boring. She was a creature of action, not chanting in circles, and she’d left Lydia’s magical education up to Aneta and Peter.

‘It’s a very rare find.’ Peter added. ‘I’m sorry to see it go.’

‘You have your own copy.’ Lydia chided. ‘Don’t be greedy.’ Her green eyes twinkled at him. ‘What about Aneta’s books? Are you going to dig them out?’

'I have them somewhere safe.' Peter replied. Like most witches, Aneta had foretold her own death and made arrangements. One of those was that Peter took away all her books for safekeeping until someone came for them. Now they knew who she'd been referring to.

'It's strange she didn't give them to him herself.' Lydia tapped her perfect pink nails on the counter.

'As far as I know, Claudia never ever brought the boy to visit.' Peter told her. 'And he definitely has no idea what he is.'

'I agree.' Lydia said. 'You can feel it fizzing right off of him. He's like a walking time bomb, which is another reason I'm watching him. You know what this town is like. And the Nemeton.'

Laura huffed. That damn magical tree was the bane of her existence.

'I have to go.' She leaned over and gave Lydia a quick kiss. 'You coming over tonight?'

'Of course.' Lydia replied. 'I'll see you later.'

'And I'll get out my earplugs.' Peter chuckled and then ducked when Laura threw the bag of garbage from lunch at him. She left the two of them happily discussing the book and walked back to her cruiser, pondering what Peter had said about Stiles Stilinski. Noah had spoken about his family when he'd come round the previous weekend, although there had been more affection expressed for his step-son than Stiles. If he was an uncontrolled Spark, then Laura could understand why. They were like trouble magnets.

Still, it would be a good idea to maybe test the waters, see what he was like. Aneta had been a good ally and an invaluable support after the fire and Laura owed her a lot. Stiles might benefit from the friendship of a small pack. And if Derek was smelling interested, that might well kill two birds with one stone.

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Stiles walked to the counter, his arms full of books. He had always been fascinated by the supernatural and spent many a happy hour spiralling down a wikipedia wormhole in pursuit of vampires and witches and werewolves. His tattoos reflected that, a combination of arcane symbols and twisting plants that he'd never really thought about. It had just felt right that he should get them.

The woman at the check out desk filled out a library record for him and handed him his card, along with his selections and Stiles left humming under his breath and feeling very much at home. He'd had such trepidation about coming to Beacon but his adventures so far had turned out to be better than anything he'd had at home up until they'd left.

It was getting on for three o'clock and his stomach was grumbling by the time he'd finished driving around, finding the school and the local mall in his travels. Stiles heard his phone ring and checked to find it was Melissa. He spoke to her briefly, promising to be home soon and then turned his jeep out into traffic and heading south. There had been a map of the town on the library wall and Stiles had been pleased to see that there was a lake to the southwest, some way into the preserve and overlooked by the range of hills that formed the backdrop to the town.

He figured he could get away with staying out for another hour and took the boundary road that ran the back of the more luxurious suburbs. The houses here were bigger and more modern and he drove along at an easy pace, checking everything out until he finally got to the road that would lead

out into the preserve and back to his grandmother's house.

He took his time, slowing when he got their drive. Something felt like it was tugging at him and Stiles looked at the road, squinting at the way it disappeared into the trees and twisted until it was out of sight. He didn't know where it led, but something told him he should find out.

The surface got rougher, the road clearly disused, and Stiles was thankful for his jeep. It went deeper and deeper into the trees and just when Stiles thought it was going to end up looping back on itself, it opened up and he saw the remains of what must have been a grand house once upon a time. His heart jumped and Stiles started grinning, completely enchanted at having made such a discovery.

He pulled up and got out, standing and taking in the building in front of him. It was ruined and fire damaged beyond repair, what had once been the third storey falling in on itself, although the second and first were both still standing enough that Stiles would bet there was some fine exploring to be had inside. The weird tugging sensation was stronger too, an almost physical urge to go inside and he followed it to the front porch, resting a hand on the right hand wooden pillar when he ascended the steps.

The zing in his hand, exactly like the one he'd felt at his grandmother's house was unexpected though and Stiles yelped when it shocked him, pulling his hand back and rubbing while he glared at the house in front of him.

'What's your deal,' he asked. 'I'm just curious.'

It was a thing he did, talking to the objects around him, and when the front door cracked and then swung open Stiles meeped, flailed and ended up falling off the porch right on his ass. Never once in all his years of one sided conversation has something ever responded and he sat there dumbfounded with his heart racing, half terrified and half desperate to get inside and see what the hell was going on. Something told him that maybe, this was no ordinary house.

This time Stiles climbed the stairs slowly, stopping to glance at the pillar. His breath caught when he saw that underneath the flaking white paint, there were symbols carved into the wood. Not only that, but they were the same ones at his own house. Drawn to them, Stiles tentatively ran a fingertip over the triskele at the top and this time the zing was warmer, softer. It felt like dipping his hand in a pleasantly hot bath and he basked in it for a moment before looking at the open door. There were shadows beyond the pool of light and he could just make out what looked like a grand staircase.

'Holy shit,' he murmured. 'Okay this is crazy. I mean, good but crazy.'

The door remained open and the tugging feeling got stronger. Stiles took one step and then another and another and finally he was standing in the front hall. As he'd suspected there was a staircase in front of him that led to a galleried landing, as well as doorways to his left and right. A glance through the one on the left showed what looked like the remains of a living room and Stiles went inside.

The windows had been boarded up but there were gaps that let in the afternoon sunlight to reveal a few pieces of furniture - a desk, a couch still upholstered in green brocade and a couple of broken chairs - as well as smoked blackened walls. Stiles moved through the space to where there had been double doors leading out the back and peered through the boards to what looked like an overgrown backyard that still had traces of what it had been. He could just make out a gazebo and a couple of arches that were hidden by the thick rambling roses that covered them. They were the same white roses as in the backyard at his grandmother's house and Stiles wondered if the

inhabitants had known her.

It was only when he walked through back into the hall that he realised just where he was standing.

‘Oh.’ Stiles looked around him with fresh eyes, his stomach lurching when he contemplated that this was where an entire family had died. The news reports had said that eight people had been killed in the fire, with four survivors. He thought back to Derek’s angry face and even angrier eyebrows and seeing the place that he’d obviously grown up now reduced to nothing but a smoky ruin gave Stiles a new appreciation for why he had been so standoffish. If it had been his house and his family, Stiles would have felt the same way.

Something caught his eye and he glanced up the staircase, frowning when something moved in the shadows at the top. Normally he’d be freaking out, but this didn’t feel sinister. In fact, it felt almost familiar and he took a hesitant step, the wood creaking under his foot. Stiles swallowed hard and kept going, making it halfway up when suddenly the memory hit him like a ton of bricks.

‘Mischief.’ His mother’s eyes were dancing. ‘You need to be careful.’ She scooped him up in her arms and laughed as she carried him down the stairs while he wriggled in protest.

‘I want to jump.’ he insisted, his eyes glued to the boy at the top of the stairs. Stiles couldn’t really make out his face, tears blurring his vision at the injustice of not being allowed to fling himself from the top to land at the bottom like the boy did.

‘You can’t, baby.’ Claudia pressed a kiss to his cheek. ‘You’re special, but not like them.’

Stiles came back into himself feeling violently nauseated. He barely made it out the house, stumbling off the porch and nearly faceplanting as the panic took him. He bolted for his jeep, getting in and tearing off and not stopping until he was back at the drive to his own house. There he had to sit for a good ten minutes, battling to get his breathing under control and stop himself from sobbing at the incredibly vivid recollection of his mom that had him feeling gutted by her death all over again. It didn’t happen often and in fact, this had been the strongest and clearest one to date and it made Stiles feel sick to his stomach.

He finally managed to get out the jeep and head inside. Melissa heard him and came out the kitchen smiling, her face falling when she took in his red rimmed eyes and his rushed breathing.

‘Stiles?’ she asked but he waved her off and hurtled upstairs, only stopping when he made it to his room and threw himself onto his air mattress to bury his face in his pillow while he tried to figure out what the hell was going on.

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Derek finished cataloging the last of the new delivery around four and then tilted his head when he heard the doorbell ringing. He immediately identified the steady thump of Boyd’s heartbeat and the lighter, faster one of Erica and came out the back. His friends were at the counter and Peter was already wearing his indulgent uncle face.

‘Take him.’ he said to them. ‘He’s been nothing but gloom and doom today.’

‘Sure thing.’ Erica grinned, her ruby red lips curved in a wicked smile. ‘Come on, Eeyore. We want to go swimming.’

‘Last weekend of summer break.’ Boyd added. He was quieter than his mate, his stoic character and razor sharp sense of humour making him Derek’s best friend. ‘Even you can’t turn that down.’

'I can.' Derek muttered, just to be contrary, but a swim did sound good. The weather was still fine and he could use the chance to just float along the surface and tune everything out for a while.

'Just go.' Peter shoved him. 'You're getting your sad everywhere.'

Derek rolled his eyes at him, but he also grabbed his jacket and followed Boyd and Erica out to Erica's truck. It was technically her mom's, but Mrs Reyes was in the throes of a new romance and her boyfriend was big on driving her everywhere so Erica got to use it as much as she wanted.

They drove down and crossed at Industry Bridge, Derek slumped in the back and listening to Erica chatter on about the start of the new semester.

'I'm thinking about the homecoming committee.' She flipped her glossy blonde curls over her shoulder. 'Maybe some other extracurriculars.'

'You'll eat everyone.' Boyd grinned at her. 'You know what you're like.'

'Ha!.' Erica snorted. 'I'd be great. Look at my sense of style.'

Derek met Boyd's eyes in the mirror and they shared a small smile.

'I don't think they're going to want wall to wall leopard print.' he said and Erica merrily flipped him the bird.

'Like you have room to talk.' she cackled. 'Grey and black are not colours that inspire teenage hijinks, Derek.'

'That's because I don't engage in teenage hijinks.' Derek grumbled.

'Pity.' Now Boyd's dark eyes were sparkling. 'Because I just so happen to have something that is the definition of hijinks.'

Derek's interest was piqued and he leaned between the front seats.

'Like what?' he asked and Boyd took out a clear plastic bag from his jacket. It was a fifth full of ground dried leaves and delicate purple flowers. 'Oh shit. Is that what I think it is?'

'Maybe.' Erica grinned at Boyd, her face full of pride. 'If he's got the strain right.'

Boyd looked abashed but Derek knew he was pleased, could tell from the warm cookie scent he was giving off. He was something of a prodigy when it came to plants. Talia would have loved him and taken Boyd under her wing to teach him everything she knew about growing vegetables and flowers and the more obscure plants that she'd loved. Peter was the herbalist in the pack but only because her job had taken up most of her time, but when it had come to green thumbs she'd had one of the best. Now Boyd was learning his craft, using the tomes on herbalism that had been in the shop's basement. His ambition was to study horticulture at UC Davis, a doable drive from Beacon Hills and meaning he'd be within easy commute of the pack.

'Here.' Boyd handed it back to him. 'You can roll.'

Derek huffed but took the baggie, reaching for his papers. He balanced the bag on one knee while he worked, making the crutch from the paper holder and sprinkling the wolfsbane in evenly. He'd started smoking sophomore year when the pack had all been bitten. Erica had been the expert, using cannabis to help alleviate her epilepsy. She'd no longer needed it after her change but then they'd discovered that Peter knew about a particular type of wolfsbane that had the same effect and

he'd pointed it out to them on a walk one day. It hadn't been very strong and they'd only managed to get high for twenty minutes which was when Boyd had started experimenting. He now had a half a dozen different varieties but this last one had been his baby for a good six months.

The joint was a little looser than he liked, mostly because Erica drove like a woman possessed even when faced with dirt roads. Derek stuck it in his mouth when she finally parked, getting out and digging for his lighter. It had been in the pocket, the jacket left in the black Camaro that James Hale had driven. He ran a thumb over the inscribed date - Talia had given it to James for his fortieth birthday several years before he died - and lit up, inhaling and appreciating the pungent scent of the wolfsbane. He took another hit off the back of the first before he passed it and held the smoke it. It had an odd purple tinge when he exhaled, smiling at how Erica was making happy noises.

'Hoo boy.' Her smile was incandescent. 'This is the shit, baby.' She leaned into Boyd, hanging off his arm as they walked through the trees towards the lake. They'd come in through the public side, but it was only a mile or two along the bank to Hale property.

'It's good.' Derek agreed and Boyd's eyes flashed gold. He took his own hits, exhaling like he was smoking a fine Monte Cristo.

'Got to say, I impress even myself.' he replied.

They strolled along the pathway, all of them visibly relaxing as the wolfsbane took hold. Derek felt like he was floating about a foot off the ground by the time the glitter off the lake's surface was visible through the trees. He could just make out two people in the water already, noticeably preoccupied, and he grinned, his steps turning stealthy as he approached.

Cora and Isaac were so busy making out that they didn't even notice them coming, not until Derek got within yelling distance and let out an ear splitting roar that had them leaping away from each other and going under the water, coming up spluttering and cursing while he and Erica fell about laughing. Boyd, never one to let go even when he was stoned, chuckled behind them.

'Derek, you asshole!' Cora raged, floundering back to shore. 'I'm going to piss in your boots later!'

'Nice.' Derek drawled, setting himself down on a fallen log to untie said boots. 'And Lo says you're housebroken.'

'Fuck you.' Cora grumbled, coming to wrap soggy arms around a shrieking Erica. Isaac hadn't followed and Derek snickered, smelling exactly why he was reluctant to come out of the water.

'You look stupid.' he said and Isaac bared his teeth at him. He was feisty and timid by turns, his history of child abuse at the hands of his now thankfully deceased father turning him into a complete contradiction in terms.

'Yeah, well you surprised us.' He folded his arms defensively and Derek exchanged grins with Boyd.

'You need to find a better place to fuck.' Boyd took another hit and handed off the joint to Derek. Cora came to sit next to him, giving him her best puppy eyes and he sighed and offered it to her before stripping out of his clothes. Erica was already butt naked, splashing happily into the water to try and swamp Isaac. Derek folded everything and joined them, shoving Erica under the water before Cora jumped on his back, long legs wrapping around him as she tried to knock him off his feet while growling loudly in his ear.

‘Jesus.’ Boyd was on the log, caretaking the joint and looking like he was not going anywhere for a while. ‘You make so much noise, Cora.’

‘You don’t get to judge until you’re in the water.’ Cora snarked back, but she released Derek so he could swim out a little further, her attention now turned to a bedraggled Erica.

He floated out on his back, keeping himself propelled with lazy kicks as he listened to the spirited water fight going on. They were far enough away that he could close his eyes and drift off, the wolfsbane making him feel free and relaxed enough that when his thoughts drifted to the very odd person that was Stiles Stilinski and his beguiling scent, Derek didn’t even try to push them away.

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Scott got home from his first day at the vet clinic bouncing like one of the puppies he’d helped to look after. Stiles was busy peeling potatoes for Melissa when he came in with his dark eyes sparkling, having finally managed to calm down enough to help with dinner.

‘You’re not going to believe what happened.’ he said, going to wash his hands and then bumping shoulders with Stiles.

‘Did you get peed on?’ Stiles asked, trying for snarky but coming out with something a little far of the mark. He ignored Melissa’s concerned look. Thankfully, Scott was too caught up in himself to notice that he was acting off.

‘No.’ He went to get some plates from the cupboard and started laying the table. ‘I did get to help with some kittens though, but that’s not the best part.’

Stiles frowned. He had trouble thinking of something better than kittens. Unless, of course, it was sulky gorgeous boys with green eyes, but he kept that to himself.

‘What happened?’ Melissa asked, her nimble hands busy working at meatloaf she was making.

‘So I was busy closing up.’ Scott said. ‘Dr Deaton was out back and then this girl comes in with a dog that she hit.’

‘Jesus.’ Stiles blurted out. ‘That’s terrible.’

Scott seemed to falter and then brightened.

‘No, it’s okay.’ he replied. ‘The dog, I mean. Dr Deaton got him all fixed up. He’s just got a broken leg. You’re missing the point.’

‘I think a dog getting hit by a car is a pretty big point.’ Stiles muttered but then he caught the disapproving look Melissa was giving him and shut up.

‘The girl’s the point.’ Scott looked dreamy. ‘She’s also just moved to town. Her and her family are here from Texas.’ He leaned back against the counter and beamed at them. ‘She’s so pretty. She’s got this dark hair and these killer dimples and I think she’s amazing.’

‘What’s her name?’ Melissa asked, giving him a warm smile and Stiles bit his lip.

‘Allison.’ Scott smiled. ‘Allison Argent.’

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Laura was getting ready to go home when Noah Stilinski stopped by her desk. He gave her an

affable smile and she returned it. He seemed like a good guy, earnest and straightforward with an air of easy authority that she appreciated.

‘Can I have a word?’ he asked and Laura nodded. She got up and followed him into his office, closing the door behind her.

‘Is something wrong?’ she asked when he sat down and indicated she take the other chair.

‘Not exactly.’ he replied. ‘But I need to talk to you about a couple of things.’

‘Sure.’ Laura tuned in, listening to the steady thump of his heart. It was strong and clear, a good indication of his cardiac health as well as a useful lie detector.

‘I’m talking to you because I know that you’ve got two siblings at the high school.’ Noah said, lacing his fingers and resting them on the desk. ‘From what I can see, Beacon High is excellent academically and good for their extracurriculars. I just wanted an insider’s opinion.’

‘It’s a good school.’ Laura smiled. ‘The teaching is solid, except for the chemistry teacher, Harris. He’s an asshole, but everyone else is great.’

‘What about guidance?’ Noah asked. He looked a little unsettled, his heart ticking up in what Laura could tell was an attempt to hide his concern. Worry was bleeding a sour note into his normal woody scent.

‘I think I know what you’re getting at.’ She sat back. ‘I mean, we don’t really gossip here but everyone knows that you lost your wife.’

‘Yeah.’ Noah sighed. ‘And Stiles, my son, he took it really hard. He had a therapist in San Francisco and he’s had some trouble with...well, let’s just say teenage experimentation. I was wondering if maybe you’d know what the guidance counsellor is like.’

Laura thought about her conversation with Peter and knew what she had to do.

‘I have someone.’ she said. ‘They worked with Derek and Cora after the fire. Marin’s excellent. I’d be happy to pass your details on to her if you’d like?’

The tension in Noah’s shoulders eased immediately.

‘That would be great.’ he said, smiling as relief flooded his scent. ‘I’m sorry I’m asking, but I thought in light of your situation...’

‘Not a problem.’ Laura replied. ‘I’d be happy to help.’

Talia had always told her that she should follow fate, that certain things were always going to happen and that Laura should allow them to. This definitely felt like one of them.

‘Thank you.’ Noah said. ‘I really appreciate it. Stiles has been, well...troubled. He’s one of the main reasons we’re here. I’m hoping that Beacon Hills will be good for him.’

Laura recalled the distinctive scent of magic that had suffused the bookshop and the way Peter had looked at her when she’d realised that Claudia Gajos’ son was a Spark.

‘Don’t worry, Boss.’ She got up, her mind already racing with possibilities. ‘I think it will be.’

Chapter 4

The trees were thick with needles, the shady parts underneath them perfect to sit and listen to the woods around them. The problem was that the other boy couldn't sit still for very long and it made Derek sigh. He relented nonetheless, letting himself be tugged along by one hand in search of beetles and small things, things that Derek could sniff out for them to look at.

The boy was shorter than him, his dark hair a crow's nest of tangles and the occasional twig. His incessant chatter made Derek smile and he inhaled deeply, the scent of the boy like the air before a thunderstorm. Laura had sat through one with them a few days ago and they'd giggled and Derek had caught the boy and pressed his nose to his neck, gently scenting him.

'You're up early.' Peter's voice broke through his thoughts and Derek looked away from the back yard of the farmhouse, his brain clawing at what felt like a memory but couldn't be. Derek hadn't had another little boy to play with, just Laura and Cora and occasionally his cousins from Big Sur, who were all older.

'Couldn't sleep.' he replied. 'Well, no that's not quite right. Something woke me up but I'm not sure what it is.' He shifted, leaning heavily against the porch beam. He wasn't quite lying. Derek wasn't sure what the dream had meant when he woke up from it, feeling a sense of loss. It wasn't akin to what he'd felt after the fire. That had made him feel sick to his stomach, panting for air while the pack bonds snapped and it felt like his guts were being ripped out. This was melancholy, a bittersweet yearning for something he had lost even if he had no idea what it was.

He'd come downstairs, feeling himself drawn to the back porch. They had used the farmhouse as a summer house, decamping to it when the weather got too hot because it was so much closer to the lake. The dream had been of the trees that ran the border of their territory, a border that Laura ran at least once a day if she wasn't pulling a double shift. Derek had taken to running it for her, marking the trees and pissing on their markers if they needed refreshing. Laura usually did it but his scent was a suitable substitute for her authority and he liked doing it, getting a childish pleasure from pissing on trees and then raking his claws through the bark.

He wanted to go there now, to run the border and see what he found. There was something inside him calling and Derek was just curious enough to see what it wanted.

'Your sister won't be having that problem.' Peter smirked. 'I don't know what time she and Lydia finally called it a night.'

Derek grinned. They had a passionate relationship and Lydia had a fine pair of lungs. Wolves put little stock in privacy and they all learned at an early age to tune things out that they weren't supposed to be listening to, but Lydia could shatter glass when she reached orgasm so sometimes it was hard to miss.

'They'll probably sleep all morning.' He followed Peter back into the house. Cora was still sleeping too, her soft breathing deep and regular.

'Probably.' Peter glanced back at him. 'You going for a walk?'

'Thinking about it.' Derek replied, playing their little game in spite of the fact that he was dressed. He reached for his jacket. 'You want to come along?'

'No thanks.' Peter yawned. 'Go pee on bushes by yourself. I'll have breakfast ready for when you

get back.'

'Cinnamon French toast?' Derek asked hopefully. Peter made the best version, dense with butter and egg.

'Sure.' Peter smiled and cuffed him gently. 'Go run, cub.'

Derek ducked his head, growling softly when the cuff turned into a ruffle of his hair. He left him in the kitchen, humming to himself as he set up the coffee maker. Outside the front door, the breeze brought him all the smells of the preserve and he turned his nose in the direction of the territory line and took off.

While he loped along, Derek thought about the night before. They'd gone back to Erica's house after their swim, gorging on frozen pizza and curly fries while they watched both versions of Fright night and debated the respective merits of Chris Sarandon versus Colin Farrell. At midnight, Derek and Cora had made their way home. The night had been clear and they'd both been in the mood to not talk much and he'd realised when they got home that he'd spent the entire walk thinking about Stiles Stilinski.

Now he did the same, his senses lingering on the way Stiles smelled. He thought about his warm brown eyes, gold and amber in the light of the shop and glowing like a beta wolf's eyes would. Peter was right. Derek was undeniably attracted in a way that both confused and frustrated him, while also secretly pleased, and he couldn't help thinking that maybe Stiles working at the shop was actually going to be a good thing. They hadn't had the best start, Derek being too thrown by his reaction to Stiles and his scent but now he'd had a chance to think it over, he really wanted to see him again.

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Stiles didn't sleep well that night. He dreamed of dark woods and glowing golden eyes, the sense that something or someone was chasing him but never getting close enough for him to see. Oddly enough he didn't feel afraid, just extremely frustrated and when he finally woke up, it was still dim outside. A quick look at his phone told him it was just after five, but Stiles knew he wouldn't be able to go back to sleep.

He got up, dressing quickly in sweats and a t-shirt, dragging his long disused running shoes from his gym bag. Stiles had run decent times on the track and cross country teams before his downward spiral and something about the misty grey sky he could see through his window had him want to go running through the trees.

He'd spent the night before on the internet, reading everything about Beacon Hills and also wading through the Hale Books website. Peter's back catalogue was enormous and incredibly expensive and Stiles didn't know what half the volumes were about. Peter had a leaning towards history, mythology and science based volumes from Europe and East Asia, and the brief and beautifully written summaries made Stiles' hands itch with a desire to hold them and flip through their no doubt immaculate pages and read about all those things that sounded a thousand miles from his so far disappointing existence.

Now he stood in front of the window looking out into the garden. A run would be good and then Stiles had plans to go look in the greenhouse. His curiosity hadn't been abated by the weird experience in the Hale house or his dreams.

The rest of the house was still sleeping when he slipped out through the back, stamping down weeds as he made his way past the greenhouse and to the back fence. A quick glance through the

grubby glass showed him more tangled plants inside but also planters and shelves and what looked like a dresser at the front. Stiles grinned, tapping his knuckles once on the glass and then took off, hurdling the back fence and jogging off into the trees.

One of the things he'd found online was a map of the preserve. It tracked the line of property along the rear fence of his grandmother's house and then swerved inward to what he now knew was the Hale property, which extended further back into the preserve right down to the northern edge of the lake. There were a number of walking trails that ran the border of the Hale property and he soon found one, about five hundred feet from the back fence. It was old but well worn, the dirt compacted as it wound through the trees.

Stiles ran at a steady pace, not as fit as he had been but still making good time. He could hear birdsong and smell the dry scent of pine and the scrubby brush, hear the thump of his feet and the rush of blood in his ears. His body felt like it was waking up, an ache in his muscles that made his blood sing in a way that it hadn't for a long time, probably not since his mother had died. He got lost in it, speeding up and enjoying the trickle of sweat down his spine and temples.

There was a dip and Stiles leaped down from the small rise he was on, whooping like a small child. He stumbled as he hit crumbling soil, his shoes skidding until he tumbled over and landed on his front, skinning his hands and knocking the wind out of him.

'Fuck.' he muttered and started to raise himself up but that was when a pair of heavy boots, worn and dusty, came into his line of sight and Stiles gasped and rolled over. He looked up in to piercing green eyes and felt his heart do a little flip flop when he saw that the upside down face peering at him with his thick black brows drawn together belonged to one Derek Hale.

'This is private property.' he said and Stiles wrinkled his nose at him, grinning in spite of the sting in his hands.

'This is a public trail, dude.' he replied, managing to sit up. He winced as he tried to brush the ingrained dirt from the grazes on the heels of his hands and wrists and Derek snorted.

'I didn't know people used their faces to run.' he deadpanned and Stiles made a face.

'I'm out of practice.' he muttered, trying to figure out how he was going to get up. Derek rolled his eyes and sighed like a martyr and then grabbed him under the arms. Stiles yelped as he was hauled bodily to his feet. He was so surprised that he didn't even resist when Derek took hold of his wrists. The scars there were faint but Stiles knew he'd seen them when Derek frowned. He tried to take his hands back but Derek's grip was firm and unrelenting.

'You need to clean these.' he said and Stiles bit his lip at the fire that raged under his skin where Derek was touching him. His heart was racing and he cursed himself for getting a crush literally two days after getting into town.

'I can do it.' he protested. 'My house isn't far from here.'

'I know where it is.' There was a flicker of a smile on Derek's face. 'Mine's closer.'

Now it was Stiles' turn to frown. He didn't want to offend by pointing out that Derek's house was a ruin but that damn curiosity flared up again and he found himself raising his eyebrows in question.

Derek met his eyes and then ducked his head. The phantom smile disappeared and Stiles found himself desperately wanting it to come back.

‘Not there. Where we live now.’ Derek moved back, letting go of Stiles’ hands. ‘Come on, I’ll show you.’

Stiles watched him walk off, moving almost silently through the trees and glanced back once in the direction of his house. He hadn’t planned to be out so long and he hadn’t left a note but he wanted to follow Derek more than anything so he chased after him, catching up and falling into step beside him. They walked for a few minutes before he started talking.

‘What were you doing out here?’ he asked, half expecting Derek not to answer. After all, he’d seemed like a total grouch the day before but now he gave Stiles an almost shy look through those thick black eyelashes and shrugged. He was wearing the leather jacket from the day before and Stiles remembered what he’d said to Peter and felt his face heat up.

‘Just walking.’ Derek looked up into the trees. ‘I like the quiet.’

‘Yeah?’ Stiles made a face at how blood was oozing from the scratches in his hands and how it was starting to sting like a bitch. He noticed Derek’s nostrils flare and then he was holding Stiles’ by the wrist again, hand almost hidden by the overlong sleeve of his jacket. He looked at him and Derek’s eyes were intense. Stiles got more than a little lost, falling into the miasma of misty green and grey circling into the gold and honey brown around the iris. They were so beautiful and his breathing caught when suddenly Derek let go and stepped back.

‘Keep up.’ He was curt but not unkind and Stiles followed in his wake. It took a good few steps before he noticed that the pain in his hands was almost gone.

It was about twenty minutes later when Stiles saw what looked like a rooftop through the trees. He was astonished because there had been no indication of another house out there that far from the town. They got closer and he could see it was a colonial clapboard just like his grandmother’s house. It was made of weathered timber, the silvery grey allowing it to blend into the trees easily, with a covered wrap around porch and two storeys. Wind chimes hung from the eaves of the porch, their lilting tinkle giving the whole place an eerie air. Derek walked right to it, turning when he got to the stairs.

‘Are you okay?’ he asked and for a second his eyes flared gold where the sun hit them. Stiles blinked once to clear his vision and then nodded. The wood creaked under his feet the same way it had the previous evening, but it was clear that this house was a world away from the one he’d been in the day before. There was a bench on the front porch with a couple of pairs of rain boots standing neatly lined up.

That wasn’t what caught Stiles’ attention though. He was transfixed by the neat line of carved symbols on the lintel, one of them the very same triskelion as before.

‘What is that?’ he asked and Derek glanced up.

‘Family magic.’ he replied and opened the door. The rich smell of butter and sugar and cinnamon hit Stiles full frontal and his stomach growled loudly, knocking any questions about what Derek meant right out of his head.

‘Sorry.’ he said sheepishly and Derek’s half smile was back.

‘Peter’s making breakfast.’ he said. ‘If you’re nice to him, he’ll feed you.’

Stiles was still trying to get his head around the sudden change in behaviour when Peter stuck his head around a doorway. He grinned when he saw Stiles.

'If it isn't my newest assistant.' He stepped into the hall while Derek shucked his jacket and stared at Stiles hands. 'Did you have an accident?'

'I'm clumsy.' Stiles confessed. He felt stripped bare under Peter's direct gaze, bright blue eyes like a laser.

'Derek.' he said but Derek was already going up the stairs. 'Come in the kitchen, Stiles.'

Stiles followed him meekly, taking in everything around him. The kitchen was white and pale green, the cabinets right out of the fifties and the wooden floor scarred and the warm red-brown of truly old oak. The fridge was a GE, new but made to look vintage as was the cooker and Stiles wondered if Peter had been responsible for the decor. The only real modernity came in the form of a sleek chrome coffee machine on a low table.

'You don't have a dishwasher.' he said, then cringed at how stupid that sounded.

'Chores build character.' Peter pulled out of the chairs at the kitchen table. 'Sit. You've probably got dirt in those grazes.' He wet a clean cloth and came over, taking one wrist gently. Stiles wanted to fall through the floor when he saw Peter clock the scars. His self-harming had been short lived but severe enough that it had scared him into stopping. Just like with Derek, Stiles tied to take his hands back but Peter just ran a thumb over them and then started cleaning out the dirt from the grazes.

'You know.' He said it almost conversationally. 'Pain comes in many forms. Sometimes it's so wrapped around who we are that it feels like this is the only way we can let it out.' His eyes were full of sympathy when he looked at Stiles. 'Some scars are on the inside but just because you can't see them, doesn't mean they aren't there.'

His voice was full of feeling, pain that Stiles instantly recognised.

'I'm sorry.' He looked down at his hands, the grains of dirt that Peter was gently easing out of the shredded skin. 'I only lost my mom. You lost so many people.'

'We lost so many people.' Peter sighed and set the cloth down. 'Do you and your dad ever talk about her?'

'No.' Stiles said it aloud and it hurt, God it hurt. 'He can't even look at me some days. I think it's because I look so much like her.'

'You do.' Peter smiled at him. 'Your eyes are hers, and those.' He gestured at the moles on Stiles' jaw. 'Your grandmother used to call them her fawn spots.'

Stiles wanted to hear more. He wanted to hear everything.

'Will you tell me more about her?' he asked and Peter nodded.

'Once Derek's fixed you up.' he said and Stiles suddenly realised that he'd come back and was hovering just behind them with a red first aid box in his hands.

He came over and took the seat Peter had vacated.

'Here.' He had the box open and a couple of antiseptic wipes in his hands. Stiles wanted to take them from him, to hide himself from those piercing green eyes but at the same time, he dearly wanted to feel Derek's warm hands on his again even if it was only to clean him up. He acquiesced and Derek followed the same path Peter had with the cloth. He was so focused, his forehead

creased and his thick brows forming one hard black line as he worked and Stiles stole the moment, using it to study him up close.

His eyes followed the perfectly straight line of Derek's nose, down to the narrow tip. His mouth was wide and thin, his jaw a clean edge that was the same as Peter's. His dark lashes brushed his cheek and Stiles tried desperately hard to keep a leash on his stupid emotions, but his heart still started thumping away. He couldn't help but notice the light flush that set into Derek's ears and neck and then he was sitting back, discarding the used wipes and reaching for a couple of dressings.

'You need to keep the dirt out.' He still wasn't looking at Stiles, ears now crimson. He pressed the dressings to the wounds and wrapped them with a couple of bandages. He was careful and deliberate and Stiles had a flashback to Noah catching him in the bathroom, his cuts too deep this time and blood all over the tiles. His father had been crying, trying to wrap Stiles' wrists in a towel before taking him to the hospital to get stitches. Melissa had been on call and she'd been the one to do it and Stiles had not missed the way she'd looked at him and the guilt he'd felt for upsetting his father once again by his selfish behaviour.

He pulled back, hissing at the pain that caused and Derek looked at him, startled.

'I need to go.' Stiles stumbled to his feet, the panic well and truly setting in. 'I'm sorry.' He bolted, his feet finally working properly as he ran back out the front door, slamming it behind him and taking off down the drive of the farmhouse to what he hoped would be the road home.

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'What did I do?' Derek's voice shook and Peter set a hand on his shoulder and kept him from running after Stiles.

'Nothing, cub.' He sighed heavily. 'He's in a lot of pain.' He inhaled deeply, catching the sour smell of stress and anxiety that Stiles had left in his wake.

'I was trying to help.' Derek mumbled, head down and smelling subdued. Peter wanted to kill the person who'd knocked all the confidence out of his nephew all over again. He hadn't been as blind as Derek assumed. He knew that there was something he was hiding, that the person who'd set the fire that killed his pack was probably the same person that had Derek hiding in shadows and turning in on himself. Paige's death was suspicious too but it had never been investigated as such because she'd been found in the abandoned brewery with her neck broken and it was simply assumed that she'd had an accident. The whispers that had cast Derek as a murderous boyfriend had been started soon after and Peter would wager everything he had that it had been by whoever their mystery arsonist was.

'I know.' He rubbed his thumb over the nape of Derek's neck. 'Some wounds take time to heal and I don't think Stiles knows just how bad his situation has been.'

'What do you mean?' Derek looked at him, now curious.

'Do you remember how Aneta smelled?' he asked. 'Before she got sick.'

'Kind of.' Derek frowned. 'She smelled kind of like Stiles.'

'And how does he smell?' Peter asked. He didn't want to lead Derek anywhere but he was intrigued as to what Derek picked up. His nose was good but there had been precious little time for training and hunting, what with him looking after three kids and then Laura becoming a deputy.

'He smells...' Derek's frown intensified. 'Like when you lick a battery. Aneta's scent wasn't as strong though. This smells like it could singe my nose.'

Peter hummed agreement, going back to the counter as Derek closed up the first aid kit.

'It's magic.' he finally said and heard Derek's little inhalation of surprise. 'Stiles has magic. The reason it smells like it could burn your nose is because he's not learned how to use it and he's burning up from the inside with it.'

'Really? Derek looked back towards the hall. 'Does he know?'

'No.' Peter said. 'Claudia obviously never told him. How he's managed to get to eighteen without self-combusting, Christ only knows.'

'So he's like Aneta?' Derek asked and Peter shook his head.

'Stronger.' he replied, his mind starting to work. 'He's a Spark.'

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Stiles didn't know how long he ran or how much he cried but he ended up walking up his drive. He got to the front porch and went inside, hoping to avoid the others. He could hear them in the kitchen, their conversation flowing easily in a way it didn't for him. Scott said something and Noah chuckled and Stiles felt his control start to slip away. He swiped at his eyes, gritting his teeth to hold back the tears that were threatening to return.

He made it as far as the stairs before Noah was in the hallway.

'Stiles?' He sounded the usual combination of pissed off and worried, always guaranteed to make Stiles feel like shit. 'Where the hell have you been?'

'I went for a run.' He didn't turn around, not wanting Noah to see his hands. 'I'm going to go take a shower, okay?'

'No, not okay.' Noah said. 'Melissa made breakfast. Come and eat.' He turned without waiting for an answer and Stiles sighed and knew he had to face the music.

In the kitchen, Melissa was busy dishing out scrambled eggs. There was wholewheat toast and orange juice and it was all very Brady Bunch. Stiles edges to the seat furthest from them, sitting down and keeping his hands under the table. Scott gave him a quizzical look but when Stiles glared at him meaningfully, he said nothing.

'Here.' Melissa handed him a plate and he thanked her, wrapping his hoodie sleeves over the bandages and picking up his fork. He started eating, forcing the food down. The conversation continued and Stiles stayed more or less tuned out until something caught his attention.

'What?' he asked and it came out sharper than he intended judging from the looks he was getting.

'We were thinking that the yard would be nicer if we opened it up.' Melissa repeated. 'That greenhouse is old. And it's an eyesore, Stiles. It's probably rotten.'

'You're not pulling it down.' Stiles gripped his fork, the pain coming back as the grazes were stretched. 'I'll fix it.'

He didn't know why he felt so strongly about an old greenhouse but it was suddenly imperative

that nobody touch it.

‘Stiles.’ Noah raised an eyebrow at him. ‘Let’s be real here. You’re not going to fix it. It’ll stand there until it falls down by itself if we leave it to you. It’s coming down. This house needs work anyway. It’s old and Melissa had some ideas about what we could change and...’

‘No!’ Stiles was suddenly more furious than he’d ever been. ‘No! You’re not changing anything!’

He threw himself back from the table, knocking over his chair as he looked at all of them.

‘Stiles.’ Melissa was using her reasonable voice. ‘It’s not much, just opening up a few rooms and doing some renovations. You don’t need to get upset.’

‘It’s my fucking house!’ Stiles roared and the burst of sound was so strident that it completely shut everyone up. It took only a second for Noah’s face to change from shocked to seriously angry.

‘Apologise!’ he ordered, his voice cold. ‘Now!’

‘No!’ Stiles knew he’d probably be grounded forever the way he was going. ‘This is my house! Babcia left it to me! Mom grew up here and you just want to come in and bulldoze your way through it and change it so there’s nothing left of her here, just like you did when you married Melissa! You want to pretend that she never even fucking existed!’

He didn’t see the slap coming. Noah had moved so quickly and Stiles reeled back, one hand to his face. He stared at his father in horror.

Noah seemed to realise just what he’d done and was immediately stricken.

‘Stiles.’ He lowered his hand. ‘I’m sorry.’

‘Don’t.’ This time Stiles didn’t bother trying to stop the tears. ‘You never even say her name, do you know that? Every time you look at me, it’s like you’re looking at her and hating her for dying. Like you hate me.’ He whispered the last and saw his father’s face crumple.

It was too much and he ran away for the second time that day, leaving them behind and going to hide in his room. He sat down on the edge of the mattress, sniffing and feeling almost as bad as he had at his lowest point. He scrubbed away the tears and picked at the bandages until he heard the sound of footsteps outside his door.

‘Stiles.’ Noah’s voice was bereft. ‘Please let me in.’

That had Stiles frowning. He hadn’t locked the door, there was still no key, but he watched the doorknob turn and Noah try to get in and knew that somehow the house was making sure his father couldn’t enter. He sat there, viciously pleased that whatever was happening was protecting him.

‘Leave me alone.’ he spat and there was silence, then the sound of retreating footsteps. About half an hour later, Stiles heard the sound of the police cruiser leaving and shortly after that Melissa’s station wagon followed.

He got up and changed into his oldest jeans and a faded t-shirt and made sure he was wearing sneakers he wouldn’t mind fucking up. He wasn’t about to let this go without a fight.

Scott was still in the kitchen, his dark eyes huge when he looked at Stiles in clear confusion.

‘Stiles...’ he started but Stiles just waved him off.

'Do me favour Scott,' he said. 'Just don't talk to me right now.'

'But Noah said you'd take me to the mall,' Scott whined. 'Allison texted me and told me she'd be there so I have to go!'

Stiles stopped dead. He turned and was gratified when Scott looked uncertain.

'Did you just miss all of that?' he asked, completely bemused. 'Or did my dad smacking me in the face because I told your mom not to touch my goddamn house not merit your attention?'

He knew he was being unfair. He knew he was being emotional. The thing was, Stiles just didn't give a fuck anymore. He pushed past Scott and out the back door, bound and determined to prove his father wrong.

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Laura lay listening to Peter talking to Derek down below in the kitchen.

'Do you think he's doing the right thing?' Lydia was laying in the crook of her arm and Laura was trailing her fingers up and down her bare back.

'Yeah, I do,' Laura sighed. 'I can't put my finger on this but something stinks here. I've been racking my brains about it all. Did you know that Claudia died the same year of the fire? I did some digging. She had fronto-temporal dementia. She was first diagnosed a couple of years before that though.'

'How close were the deaths?' Lydia raised herself on her elbows, her green eyes sharp.

'Claudia died in the fall, two months before the fire,' Laura replied. 'What's weird is that Paige died a month later and then there was the fire. They're not connected in any way but it sure feels like there's a pattern there that's screaming at me to notice it.'

'Paige was an accident though,' Lydia twirled a lock of Laura's hair around her finger. 'She was at the distillery and fell and broke her neck.'

'Yeah,' Laura looked thoughtful. 'But nobody ever explained why she was there. Someone started a rumour that it was where she and Derek would go to have sex, in spite of the fact that they were thirteen and both goddamn virgins.' She huffed angrily. 'Derek told us they'd never even so much as gone near the place. Sheriff Haigh claimed he had a note from Derek asking her to meet him there, but Mom hired a lawyer who proved that it didn't match his handwriting. Now Stiles is here and he's had no training. Claudia didn't even warn him about the fact that he's a Spark. She made no attempt to try and prepare him. That's not what I would expect from someone who was not only supernatural herself, but who used to be part of our pack.'

'It's all very weird,' Lydia agreed. 'What are you going to do about it?'

'I think I need to have a long talk with the one person left who may have some answers,' Laura replied. 'But he's not going to like it.'

'No,' Lydia's mouth curved in a wicked smile. 'He's really not.'

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Stiles was sweaty and hot, his wrapped hands aching, but he was damned if he was going to give up.

He'd worked hard to get into the greenhouse, weed whacking his way through the overgrown plants until he was standing inside. He knew Scott had gone because he'd come out to ask if he could use the jeep. Stiles had agreed, feeling guilty for his outburst earlier. Now he was glad of the solitude.

He found that the plants inside were an odd blend of vegetables, herbs and a whole lot of things he couldn't identify. There was a tomato vine at the back overlaid with fruit and he'd picked as many of the ripe ones as he could and taken them inside so the whole kitchen smelled like tomato leaves. Hopefully Melissa would accept them as a peace offering. He wasn't really angry at her specifically, just at the disregard for him and the decisions that were made without asking. It was a running pattern and Stiles knew it was really the fact that he felt unimportant when they did that.

At the back of the greenhouse was a potting table, still crowded with small terracotta pots and gardening implements. He had no idea what half of them were, but they were well worn and clearly frequently used. He left them for later and turned his attention to the dresser. It was mostly empty except for a water stained soft cover ledger. Inside he found details of plantings and odd notations on the side in columns that he couldn't fathom. Stiles kept it aside and was just about to close the doors at the bottom when something glinted at the back. It was buried in dirt but when he dug into it, grimacing at what it might contain, he found a slender chain with a circular pendant dangling from it. It was filthy, the muck deeply ingrained, but when Stiles rubbed at it he found it was engraved with something.

He left the greenhouse, going into the kitchen and washing it under the tap. The dirt fell away to reveal that the carvings showed the phases of the moon from a hollow circle at the top to a solid one halfway around, marking the new and full moons. In between, the other phases were delicately picked out in what looked like silver. It was still tarnished but Stiles smiled like he'd discovered treasure. A quick hunt on the internet found him making a hot water and baking soda bath and leaving it to soak while he went back and carried on working.

An hour later, the pendant had come up clean and shiny and Stiles hung it around his neck, concealing it under his shirt. It spoke volumes as to his father's priorities that he hadn't so much as noticed that Stiles was hurt so hopefully he'd miss this too.

This time when he went back into the greenhouse, he felt oddly calm. Stiles didn't know why but he wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth. The pendant hung around his neck, a comforting weight and when he started pulling up tangled weeds that had burst through the earthenware tiles that were laid on the ground, he was warbling a lilting melody to himself that hadn't been heard in a very long time. If anyone had asked, Stiles wouldn't have even known he was doing it but as he did tiny motes of light detached themselves from the glass panes and danced around him to the melody.

Chapter 5

Monday morning was uncomfortable to say the least. Stiles dressed slowly, taking his time to redress his hands with dressings taken from the first aid kit Melissa kept in the bathroom. He contemplated his outfit - rust khakis, a green and black flannel and a plain black t-shirt. He looked at himself in the bathroom mirror and contemplated taking out his piercings before leaving them in in a fit of pique. If the school didn't like them, they could tell him to take them out.

A thump on the door and muffled grumbling told him Scott was awake. Stiles blew out a deep breath and went to let him in, smirking at the way Scott stumbled past, clearly not really awake yet.

Back in his room, he packed his backpack and went to the window to regard his handiwork. He'd spent the entire afternoon in the greenhouse, only coming back in when the sun started to dip and he could now see inside easily, most of the growth tamed and tied back. Scott had come back a couple of hours after he'd left and sulking about not finding Allison at the mall, although he had met a group of boys that were in the same years as them at Beacon High and hung out with them instead. Stiles had listened with half an ear before washing up and going to bed.

He'd tossed and turned but there had been no dreams, just a serious headache when he'd woken up. Stiles had dry swallowed a couple of Tylenol before getting in the shower but it was still there, pressing behind his eyes and making him snappish.

Downstairs, Melissa was putting on a load of laundry. She looked tired after her night shift and Stiles had avoided her eyes when he went to scrounge something to eat. When he felt like this, he couldn't really face food, settling on an apple and a juice pack. He was about to leave the kitchen when she spoke.

'Stiles.' She sounded uncertain. 'Can we talk? Just for a minute.'

Stiles closed his eyes against the pain in his head and then turned around.

'Not much to talk about.' he replied and saw a flash of hurt cross her face.

'Please.' she said. 'I feel terrible about what happened yesterday. I didn't mean to make it sound like I was just taking over. I thought it might be nice to fix the house up so it can be a real home. I should have asked you.'

Stiles sighed and looked at her.

'I feel like a stranger in my own family.' he said. 'And that's not on you, it's on the whole fucked up situation.'

'Your father loves you.' Melissa replied. 'He was torn up about what he did. It doesn't excuse him raising a hand to you and he knows that. It's just, you two move around each other and you're both still hurting and it kills me because you won't talk to each other.'

'He's the one that doesn't talk.' Stiles muttered, but he knew she was right. He and Noah didn't talk to each other, not the way they needed to. Claudia had been the mediator between them, easing the way for them to communicate because when it came down to it, Stiles knew that while he looked like her he was every bit his father's son as well when it came to hiding how he was feeling. He couldn't even get mad at him for the slap. Christ knew Stiles had gotten physical with him a couple of times before when he was high or drunk out of his mind.

‘Please.’ she repeated. ‘Stiles, I really want this to be a home for all of us. And you’re right, I have no say in what we do with it. It is your house and from now on, every decision gets passed by you.’

‘Okay.’ Stiles nodded, all the fight going out of him. ‘I’ll talk to him.’

‘Thank you.’ Melissa smiled. ‘Now how about I make you some actual breakfast. You can’t go to school with just that.’

‘No, I’m fine.’ Stiles backed up. ‘But I’m sure Scott will want something.’

He took the time she was thinking to escape, grabbing his things and going outside under the pretence of checking the jeep. By the time Scott finally came out, Stiles had drunk the juice and managed half the apple and the pain in his head was abating. Scott got in, still chewing and chucked his backpack over the seat. Stiles snorted and started the car, reversing out into the drive just in time to see Derek and a tall willowy dark haired girl walking down from the direction of where the farmhouse obviously was. He stopped next to them and stuck his head out the window.

‘Hi.’ He was all kinds of awkward, wondering if Derek would ignore him for the way he’d run off the day before and was pleasantly surprised when he got that sweet half smile again.

‘Hi.’ Derek stepped up to the window, looking at the jeep. ‘Nice car.’

Stiles was so used to people mocking Roscoe that it took a second to realise that Derek was being serious.

‘It was my mom’s.’ he said by way of explanation, taking in Derek’s appearance. He was in jeans and boots, a black tank under a buffalo check plaid flannel and a worn army surplus backpack over one shoulder. He looked gorgeous, black hair spiky with gel and his eyes pale jade in the morning light.

‘I get that.’ Derek rested one hand on the window frame. ‘Laura still drives my dad’s Camaro.’

‘We would be in it this morning, but someone got a ticket.’ the girl said. ‘Derek drives like he thinks he’s in Nascar so we have to catch the bus this morning. She elbowed Derek aside and smiled at Stiles. ‘Hi. I’m Cora. I’m the littlest Hale.’

It wasn’t a particularly friendly smile, her teeth brilliantly white and oddly sharp looking. It reminded him of a predatory animal. She was also in jeans and worn chucks, her henley tank a low cut blue-green with the top button undone and a black hoodie that looked a couple of sizes too big over it and Stiles wondered if she’d stolen it from her brother. Her warm hazel brown eyes were appraising and he unconsciously leaned back from her.

‘Hi.’ He was getting serious vibes from her and it obviously showed because Derek huffed and yanked her back from the window.

‘Quit scaring him, Cora.’ He shifted his backpack from one shoulder to the other. ‘I’m guessing that makes him Scott.’ He nodded at where Scott was watching everything with wide eyes.

‘Yeah.’ Stiles felt bad for his lack of manners. ‘Scott, this is Derek. And Cora apparently.’

‘Hey.’ Scott was wearing a weird look, halfway between fear and distaste. He went back to checking his phone and Stiles decided that he needed better company.

‘You guys want a ride?’ he asked and noticed how they looked at each other. There was something going on between them and Derek opened his mouth to speak but he was beaten by Cora.

‘Sure.’ she said brightly, opening the back door and climbing in before Derek could protest. ‘It beats riding the bus with the rest of the assholes.’

Stiles grinned. She was clearly feisty and opinionated and he could definitely appreciate that in a person. He looked back at Derek, seeing how he looked torn.

‘I’m sorry about yesterday.’ he murmured. ‘It was a dick move running off like that. I didn’t even say thank you.’

‘It’s okay.’ Derek’s eyes came to rest on his hands. ‘Are they better?’

‘Think so.’ Stiles replied. ‘They’re scabbed like fuck and starting to itch so I’m guessing your amazing first aid skills paid off.’

He smiled and got one back in reply. It was a little brighter than the half one and with actual teeth in it. Stiles nearly keeled over at how it lit up Derek’s face. He stared at the two oversized incisors at the front until Cora made a rude noise behind them.

‘Oh my God.’ she laughed. ‘Can you two stop with the supremely awkward flirting so we can go to school, please? Laura will kill us both if we get a tardy on our first day.’

‘Shit.’ Stiles glanced away, his face getting hot. ‘We should probably go.’

‘Yeah.’ Derek’s ears were red again. He got in behind Stiles, the jeep dipping a little under his weight, and settled in. Once the door was closed, Stiles drove off. He ignored the look that Scott was giving him but then Cora started asking questions about San Francisco and he was free to steal looks at Derek in the rearview mirror while he answered.

-

Laura was busy booting up her ancient PC when she heard Tara speaking to someone at the front desk. Her ears caught the man’s voice and something prickled down her spine. She sniffed discreetly and when she caught the scent of gun oil, cordite and what she knew to be wolfsbane, all her alarms went off.

She got up and prowled through the bullpen to stand just out of view of the front desk. There was a man there, tall and rangy with close cropped blonde hair fading to grey. His face was lined and he seemed like someone who was exhausted by everything around him. Laura watched him talk to Tara, listening as he explained that he was new in town and that he needed a security visit from the Sheriff’s office because he was an armourer by trade and kept his stock in his basement.

Laura took that as her cue. If a hunter had just arrived in town, he’d need to check in with her. That was the Code that werewolves and Hunters abided by. She stepped out into the reception area and the man’s eyes were on her, ice blue and sharp as a blade.

‘Good morning.’ Laura put on her sunniest smile as she came over. ‘You said you need a home visit?’

‘Yes.’ the man replied, giving her an appraising look. ‘That’s right. I was actually hoping to speak to Sheriff Haigh and have him come over to do it himself.’

That was her red flag. Haigh had been in the pocket of hunters and it was one of the reasons he’d left. Laura had enough on him to get him kicked out of law enforcement permanently if she so chose. His persecution of Derek and her family had gone on for the past six years, but it had been when he’d arrested Derek for speeding a month ago (something the little shit was still in trouble

for) that he'd made the first real threat. Luckily Boyd had been with Derek and recorded the whole exchange and Haigh's sneering remarks that he knew people that could get mutts like the Hales put down permanently had put the nail in his coffin. Laura had visited him that night in her full alpha form and scared him enough that he'd packed up and left the next day.

'He no longer works here.' She smiled, letting her canines lengthen just enough that she knew he'd notice. 'Sheriff Stilinski is in charge now, but he's still settling in. Luckily, I'm just starting my shift and there's been no calls to rescue cats from trees so I'll just grab my stuff.' She looked at Tara. 'Would you mind telling the boss, I'm stepping out.'

'Sure.' Tara got up and went in the back leaving them alone.

'Now.' Laura moved closer to the front desk so they were opposite each other. 'Could I just get your name, sir?'

'It's Christopher Argent.' The man sounded like he was chewing glass.

'Good to meet you, Mr Argent.' Laura let her eyes bleed red and watched how his pulse jumped in his neck. 'You can call me Deputy Hale.'

-

Stiles pulled into the parking lot of Beacon High and looked for a space.

'Try the back corner.' Derek's soft voice startled him, it was so close. Stiles turned his head and found him leaning between the seats. Their eyes met and his stomach lurched pleasantly.

'Okay.' He headed in that direction, taking a space that Derek pointed out next to an old blue pickup truck. There were three kids hanging around the back - a tall white boy with dark blond curls, a very hot blonde Latina and a tall broad black boy. They all grinned as Cora fell out of her side of the car, going to wrap herself around the blond boy and kiss him.

'That's Isaac.' Derek said. 'He's Cora's boyfriend. The other two are Boyd and Erica.' He got out and Stiles watched as he made his way around the back of Roscoe, bumping fists with Boyd and hugging Erica. For a moment Stiles was gutted but then Erica danced away and wrapped herself around Boyd in much the same manner as Cora was still doing with Isaac and he realised that they were obviously a couple.

'Why are we all the way back here?' Scott was grumbling. 'Look, I'm going to go see if I can find Theo.'

'Theo?' Stiles frowned.

'Yeah, one of the guys I met yesterday.' Scott huffed. 'You can hang out with the weirdos if you want.'

'What do you mean weirdos?' Stiles asked and Scott rolled his eyes at him.

'Theo told me. The Hales, man. They're bad news. You shouldn't be making friends with them or their freaky ass friends.' He got out. 'I'll see you in homeroom.'

Stiles was taken aback. He had no idea who this Theo person was, but he clearly had a problem with Derek and his family. He saw how Scott stalked off across the lot and then got out, hanging back a bit until Derek beckoned him over.

‘Stiles, these are my friends.’ he said and then nodded at him. ‘Guys, this is Stiles. He’s the new sheriff’s kid.’

‘Hi.’ Erica gave him a raspberry pink smile, flicking her thick glossy caramel curls over her shoulder. She was a knockout, all curves in a white low cut top, shrunken leather jacket and black miniskirt with leopard print stilettos on the end of her long legs. ‘It’s nice to finally see someone new around here who’s not a total dweeb.’

‘Thanks.’ Stiles grinned back, unable to not in that face of the sunny smile. ‘Most people take one look at me and run in the opposite direction.’

‘Just so long as you like hanging with the losers.’ Boyd said. He was in a raglan t-shirt, the black sleeves stretched obscenely over arms like tree trunks. He was about twice as wide as Stiles was, but his smile was genuine and sweet and his black eyes were kind.

‘Yeah.’ Isaac had disentangled himself enough from Cora to speak. ‘If you want any kind of reputation at all, you need to pretend you never met us.’ He was also in jeans and chucks, a baggy olive green sweatshirt swamping what looked like an angular frame.

Stiles took it all in, the five of them all watching him for a reaction. He smiled and for the first time in a while, it was completely heartfelt.

‘In that case...’ He stripped off his flannel and tied it around his waist, snickering at the delighted way they all stared at his tattoos. ‘I might as well let it all hang out.’

‘Damn.’ Erica came over, running one hand down his left arm. ‘These are gorgeous.’ She winked at Derek. ‘Look’s like you’re not the only one with ink anymore.’

‘You have a tattoo?’ Stiles was surprised.

‘On my back.’ Derek’s eyes were fixed on his arms. ‘Nothing as amazing as yours. Those must have taken ages.’ He sounded a little bit dazed and Stiles was thrilled.

‘I had them done over a month just after I turned eighteen.’ he replied. ‘My dad was furious but hey. Legally an adult so it’s not like he could say anything.’

‘You’re eighteen?’ Isaac grinned. ‘So you’ll be in senior year with us?’

‘Actually no.’ Stiles shuffled his feet. ‘I kind of missed a whole lot of seventh grade when my mom died.’ He waited for the inevitable fake sympathy but then Isaac snorted.

‘Great.’ He was smirking at Derek. ‘Another kid to join the Dead Moms club.’

Stiles frowned as Erica took his arm and started to steer him towards the school.

‘There’s a reason people avoid us.’ she explained. ‘Isaac’s mom died and his dead dad used to beat the crap out of him. Now he lives by himself in the house in Beacon Hill’s cemetery while his brother serves overseas. Boyd’s little sister Alicia disappeared when she was ten and nobody knows what happened to her. I had epilepsy so bad I used to have fits and piss myself in the middle of class. One time this asshole put it all over the internet. And Derek and Cora...well, I’m sure you know the story.’

‘Holy shit.’ Stiles gaped at her and then twisted to glance over his shoulder at Derek. He was walking with Boyd behind them and looking surprisingly amused.

‘All true.’ he drawled. ‘Don’t forget the fact that half the town thinks I murdered my best friend when I was thirteen and more than likely burned down my own house.’

‘Don’t forget how you’re also the town bad boy that deals drugs and is probably responsible for half the damn crime rate.’ Boyd chuckled. ‘Although as one of Beacon’s very few black kids, I thank you for taking the heat off of me. People cross the damn road when they see me coming but if you’re around I look like the poster boy for clean living.’

‘Fuck off.’ Derek said easily, falling into step on Stiles’ other side. ‘Also don’t worry about being older. I’m nineteen and still in senior year. Cora and I also took a year out after the fire.’

‘Jesus, don’t remind me.’ Cora groaned from where she was glued to Isaac’s side. ‘I’m going to be in class with fifteen year-olds, Derek. They’re kids.’

‘So are you, dipshit.’ Derek shot back. ‘But if anybody fucks with you, tell them the sheriff will never find the body.’ He gave Stiles a sidelong grin and it was so impish that Stiles couldn’t help returning it.

‘I don’t know.’ he said. ‘My dad’s really good at his job.’ It was true. Noah could be an emotionally repressed asshole, but he was a seriously good cop.

‘Yeah but I know a thousand places in the preserve nobody goes.’ Derek replied, bumping Stiles’ shoulder with his own. Stiles grinned madly at him, completely enamoured with this playful Derek he was seeing. Clearly his friends brought him out of his shell. Stiles could see why. He felt comfortable with them in a way that it usually took ages to normally achieve but their no fucks attitude and straightforwardness had already won him over. After Heather had been killed, Stiles had pretty much cut himself off from everyone except for Scott. Now it felt like he might actually have a shot at some real friends.

‘So what classes are you taking?’ Erica asked. ‘We could be sharing some AP stuff.’

‘I hope so.’ Stiles meant it.

They got closer to the school, a typical high school that was probably built in the eighties some time. He caught a glimpse of Scott standing with a group of guys and one girl and noticed who they all glared at Derek and their friends as they passed.

‘Just a word of warning.’ Boyd offered as he held open the door for them all. ‘You might want to tell him that Theo’s not good people. Neither are his merry little band of bullying assholes.’

Stiles clocked the group again, frowning at how comfortable Scott seemed to be with them.

‘That one with the bad hair and the camera who thinks he’s Terry Richardson.’ Erica was leaning in to murmur this in his ear. ‘He’s the asshole who taped me during a seizure and put it online. Boyd would like to beat his ass into next week.’

‘Yeah.’ Boyd glared in the direction of the group. ‘But Erica thinks it would damage my permanent record.’

‘It would, baby.’ Erica switched, moving to hold his hand. ‘And then where would we be?’

‘I’m going to the office with Isaac.’ Cora said to Derek. ‘Stiles, do you want to come with us?’

‘He doesn’t need you.’ Stiles turned to see Lydia standing there watching them. ‘He has me.’ She smiled brightly and came over to them, her heels clicking. ‘Hi. I’m your new student mentor.’

'How?' Stiles asked, already impressed. He looked at Derek, who just smirked and moved off with Erica and Boyd.

'Don't get him into trouble.' he said and Lydia crinkled her nose and stuck her tongue out at him.

'Don't worry.' She took Stiles' arm the same way Erica had. 'Your boy toy is safe with me.'

Stiles started to protest but was distracted by the way Derek tripped over his own feet when she said that. He stomped off muttering without looking back, his ears red all over again.

Lydia laughed but not unkindly. It reminded Stiles of the wind chimes outside the Hale house.

'He likes you.' she purred. 'He's completely in denial but he does.'

'Really?' Stiles tried to look back for him, but Lydia was surprisingly strong for such a little thing and towed him along beside her. 'Does he even swing that way?'

'Oh yeah. Derek's very much queer and not quiet about it.' Lydia smirked. 'But he's also super slow-burn. It's the biggest source of crushing disappointment of the general population of Beacon Hills High that he's never even so much as looked at a girl or a guy while he's been enrolled here.'

'Huh.' Stiles said. 'I thought he'd be beating them off with a stick.'

'Oh, he is.' Lydia replied. 'There's always some or other hopeful that tries their luck. Last year it was Theo Raeken. Derek blew him off because he's a complete asshole and now Theo's got it out for him.'

'Okay, I really don't like the sound of this dude.' Stiles said. 'And Scott's gone and made friends with him and his buddies.'

'Hmmm.' Lydia narrowed her eyes. 'You're going to want to nip that in the bud.'

'Sounds like it.' Stiles said. They were now in a corridor that led to a row of offices and Lydia steered him into the first one where an older woman was busy handing over a schedule to a very pretty girl with a cloud of dark brown curls and a dimpled smile. Stiles had a sudden thought that he may have just stumbled across the elusive Allison.

'Thank you.' she said to the administrator and turned, almost bumping into them. 'Oh my God, I'm sorry.' She looked abashed.

'That's okay.' Lydia was looking her up and down. 'Okay, before you run away can I just say that I love that jacket. It's absolutely killer.'

'My mom was a buyer for a boutique back in San Francisco.' Maybe-Allison replied. 'She used to put things aside for me.'

'And you are my new best friend.' Lydia grinned, depositing Stiles at the desk. 'Mrs Clark, this is Stiles Stilinski. He's new and needs his schedule while I talk to...' She let the sentence hang.

'Oh. Allison.' Allison said, smiling. 'Allison Argent.'

'Well, Allison Argent.' Lydia drew her aside. 'Tell me more about your mom's boutique.'

Stiles frowned, something that Scott had said itching at the back of his mind. Mrs Clark peered at him over her glasses, fingers dancing over her keyboard.

'I can't find a Stiles,' she said. 'But I do have a...' She squinted at her screen. 'How do you even say that?'

'Usually badly,' Stiles sighed. 'Hence the Stiles.'

'Hmm,' Mrs Clark printed off a schedule and handed it to him. 'You have homeroom with Coach Finstock. Room 117.'

'That's the same as me,' Lydia smiled.

'Me too,' Allison added and Stiles had to admit that she was adorable.

'Thank you,' Stiles turned just as Scott was coming in. 'Hey, where have you been?'

'Around,' Scott was staring at Allison like a love struck puppy. 'Hi.'

'Hi,' Allison replied. 'Vet guy, right?'

'Yeah,' Scott beamed. 'I'm Scott. We really didn't get a chance to talk much.'

'How's the dog?' Allison asked and he looked thrown for a moment.

'Oh fine,' he sounded dismissive and for some reason it made Stiles really angry. It was the same obliviousness that Scott had shown the day before.

'I'm going to home room,' he announced.

'Yeah, I should to,' Allison said and looked hopefully at Lydia. 'Can you show me where it is?'

'Sure,' Lydia replied and they followed her out the office, leaving Scott behind looking like he'd just been kicked.

'God thank you,' Allison said as soon as they were down the hall. 'He's sweet but so pushy. I was kind of hoping I could avoid him.'

'Oh,' Lydia glanced at Stiles.

'What?' Allison went pink. 'Is he your friend? Jeez, I can't even go five minutes without putting my foot in my mouth.'

'He's actually my step brother,' Stiles replied. 'But don't worry. I know just how pushy he can be. He's harmless though. He just gets kind of tunnel vision when he sees a pretty girl.'

'Thank you,' Allison said, her dimples getting deeper.

'Don't get excited,' Lydia nudged her. 'He's taken.'

'Lydia,' Stiles flailed at her. 'I'm not.'

'Please,' Lydia snorted. 'Derek's not the only one who's deeply in like.'

'Derek?' Allison looked bemused. 'Also, how have you found a boyfriend on the first day of school?'

'He's not my boyfriend,' Stiles hissed but Lydia just laughed at him.

'Not yet,' she declared and marched them down the corridor.

-

Laura pulled up outside the house she had followed Chris Argent to. It was in one of Beacon's more expensive suburban streets, a redbrick and stucco McMansion that she hated the sight of instantly. He was waiting for her when she got out and he gestured towards the house.

'The armoury is in my basement.' he told her. 'You'll have to come in.'

Laura knew it was time.

'Are you willing to abide by the Code?' she asked and he flinched and then nodded curtly.

'I am.' he replied. 'Please, Alpha Hale. You are welcome in my house and I promise to abide by the laws of my kind and offer you safe meeting.'

Laura had been taught the ritual words by Talia but then had never been invoked in her time as alpha. Her eyes flashed once and Chris' mouth thinned but he was still courteous as he led the way to the front door, opening it and ushering her in.

The interior of the house was as blandly stylish as the outside and Laura sniffed the air. It smelled like industrial cleaner, obviously from the estate agent's deep clean, coffee and weapons. She waited for him to come in and he stood there, looking uncomfortable.

'Would you like some coffee?' he eventually asked and Laura shook her head.

'No thank you.' she replied. 'I'd like to do the check and then maybe have a conversation about why there are Hunters in Beacon Hills. We haven't broken the truce and my recent additions to the pack were sanctioned by Deucalion himself.'

'I know.' Chris was clearly on the defensive, even if his heartbeat was steady. 'Trust me, this will need coffee.'

'All right.' Laura relented. 'Lead the way.'

-

Stiles sat down in a seat at the back. Lydia was next to him and Allison was on the other side. She seemed really nice and Stiles was hopeful that she'd be another one to add to his new friends.

A pair of boys came in, one deeply tanned and with dimples that rivalled Allison's and the other blond and with shrewd blue eyes. They came to sit in front of them and the blond swung around in his seat.

'New kids, Lyds?' he asked with a smirk. 'That's most unlike you.'

'Vested interest.' Lydia replied, grinning. 'Allison knows what this season's silhouette is and as for Stiles, well let's just say that he's taken an interest in Derek.'

'No shit.' The blond regarded him. 'Why? Hale's a socially awkward freak.' He looked Stiles up and down. 'Then again, he'd probably be his type.'

'Hey! *He's* right here.' Stiles retorted and the other boy snickered. 'And Derek's cool.'

'Don't listen to him.' Lydia smirked. 'Jackson and Derek have the whole lacrosse/basketball rivalry going so they're totally frenemies.'

'I don't know, Jacks.' The dark boy with the dimples fluttered long lashes at Stiles. 'I think he's cute, in a punk kind of way. I like the tats.'

'Don't front.' Jackson gave him an indulgent smile and then held out a hand to Stiles. 'Jackson Whittemore. I'm the lacrosse captain and best dressed person here.'

'Also the biggest bitch.' Lydia retorted and he smiled at her with perfectly even teeth.

'Stiles Stilinski.' Stiles shook the offered hand, still bemused by the insults and then the sudden turnabout.

'Danny Mahealani.' This was from the other boy. 'I have the dubious pleasure of being his boyfriend.' He looked pointedly at Jackson, who rolled his eyes.

'It was the jacket, right?' He grinned at Allison. 'That's why you're Lydia's new best friend.'

'It was.' Allison tucked a curl behind her ear. 'How did you guess.'

'He knows me too well.' Lydia smirked. 'We used to date in a former life where both of us were pretending not to be gay.'

'Oh.' Allison's eyes widened. 'I mean, that's perfectly fine.'

'Obviously you're in the club if you're interested in Derek.' Danny grinned at Stiles. 'But, you're going to have your work cut out for you. Derek doesn't really do people.'

'Oh contraire.' Lydia looked smug. 'I happen to know for a fact that he's not only interested but, dare I say, he may be on his way to smitten.'

'Bullshit.' Jackson looked sceptical. 'Derek's like a goddamn monk. He holds onto that cherry so tightly, someone will have to pry it from his cold dead hands.'

That had Stiles choking on his own spit.

'You're shitting me.' he spluttered and Lydia glared at Jackson.

'Derek's virginity is not up for discussion.' she said pertly. 'Or everyone's going to know about your penchant for lingerie, Jackson.'

'Whatever.' Jackson snorted and turned back around. 'I'm a fucking vision in lace.'

Stiles found himself exchanging glances with an equally gobsmacked Allison.

'This place is nuts.' he mouthed at her and she giggled behind her hand.

-

Laura did the inspection as thoroughly as possible. She was pleased to see that Chris clearly took his work seriously, with all the necessary security precautions that were required by the county.

'It all checks out.' she said, taking the last of the photos she needed for the report. 'I'll get this all typed up and you'll have the certificate in three days.'

'Thank you.' Chris rubbed the back of his neck, avoiding her eyes. Laura decided that she needed to know what the hell had him so jumpy.

'You ready to tell me what's going on?' she asked and he huffed.

'We had a problem.' he started and then sighed heavily, all pretense vanishing as he seemed to age before her eyes. 'My father had a run in with a rogue alpha wolf that he'd been tracking. He'd been trying to take it down before it killed more people. Unfortunately, it got to him first and killed him. Not long after that, while my wife and I were tracking it across the country, it bit her.'

Laura was aghast. She knew all too well what hunters who'd been bitten did and the stricken look on Chris' face told her that his wife had obviously gone down that path and taken her own life rather than turn, like being a werewolf was worse than dying. It made no sense to her but then again, hunters weren't renowned for their sound decision making.

'Who was the wolf?' she demanded and Chris grimaced.

'His name was Ennis.' he replied, avoiding her eyes and immediately putting her on alert. 'My father and he had an old grudge.'

'I know him.' Laura replied, watching and listening carefully. 'He was an associate of Deucalion, and he was one of my mother's closest friends. I don't know very much about your clan. Unfortunately my whole pack was murdered before I completed my training but I have enough experience to know the law between your kind and mine.'

'Yes, I'm sure you do.' Chris leaned against the wall looking drained. 'I'm sorry. Your pack was peaceful. There was an investigation by the Council but I never felt they looked at it as thoroughly as they should have.'

'How well did you know my pack?' Laura was curious. Chris' eye twitched and she filed that away for further notice along with the tiniest uptick in his heart rate.

'We lived here for a time when I was in high school.' he replied. 'It's one of the reasons we knew we had to come back. I'm sorry to tell you this, but we tracked the alpha here. I have no idea what he wants, but we need your help to catch him.'

'And you're sure this alpha is dangerous?' Laura asked. 'Is he feral?'

'Absolutely.' Chris said, and this time his heart beat steady. 'The alpha ripped my father to pieces without a second thought. He's been killing his way across four states on his way here. He's a serious danger and seems to have fixated in Beacon Hills for reasons that are unknown to me. I don't think he ever came back after that meeting, but I couldn't swear to it. So I'm here to find him and take him down.'

'I see.' Laura said, now completely intrigued. Chris' heart was stuttering but only when he used the words 'he' or 'him'. 'Are you alone?'

'No.' Chris said. 'My daughter is here with me but she follows the Code like I do. We hadn't inducted her yet, but with times being what they are...' He trailed off.

Laura wasn't surprised. Hunters usually started when they could first hold a weapon. Chris seemed to realise what she was thinking.

'Allison is a good kid.' he told her. 'She's smart and talented and I have had so many reservations about putting her through what I went through with my training. I've tried to shield her as much as possible but the death of her mother has hit her hard and she's keen to prove herself.'

Laura thought about her pack, her broken young wolves who all needed a family and someone to

take care of them. Then she thought about this motherless hunter and gave Chris a stern look.

'I understand that.' she replied. 'But know if she steps out of line, she'll be subject to the law as much as you would be. Now how can I help?'

-

Stiles was oddly charmed by BHHS. Finstock was clearly certifiable and had hair that made him look like a sporty older Henry Spencer. He'd ranted about team spirit and tryouts for lacrosse and how they were going to wipe the basketball team's record off their smug faces or something along those lines.

Scott had come in just before the bell rang with a smarmy looking boy, sitting together at the far side with a girl with dark wavy hair. Lydia had made a face and leaned over to write 'Matt Daehler and Tracy Stewart - major assholes!' on his notebook. Stiles got a better look at the person who'd humiliated Erica and decided Lydia was bang on the money. Tracy didn't look much nicer, her mouth twisted in a mocking smile when she glanced over at him and Lydia.

Allison was between Lydia and Scott, not really paying attention. She was busy digging around in her bag and Stiles saw the exact second Scott spotted his opening. He leaned over and offered her a pen and Allison blinked in surprise, although she did take it with a small smile.

Stiles regarded all of this with interest. He was pretty good at reading people and Allison was all sunshine until nobody was looking. The smile became wariness for a second and Stiles suddenly realised that she looked exhausted before she caught herself and her sunny dimpled smile was back. He knew the look of someone playacting everything was okay all too well and even though those flickers were barely seconds, Stiles decided that he'd see if she was willing to talk about it. New kids had to stick together.

After homeroom Stiles had his first AP class for English Literature and Composition.

'This is where I hand you over.' Lydia said cheerfully. 'I've got AP Physics next.'

They both looked at Allison and she gestured at the corridor in front of them.

'AP French.' she replied. 'Guess I'll see you in the canteen?' They'd all discovered that they had the same lunch period.

'Of course.' Lydia smiled. 'We'll be at the back.' This was to Stiles. 'Have fun.'

He watched them go and then went to the doorway, peeking into the classroom. To his utter delight, he saw Derek in the back far corner. He was looking out the window, tapping his pen idly against those perfect bunny teeth of his but the second Stiles came into the room, he glanced over. He smiled and nodded at the empty seat next to him and Stiles went without any hesitation.

He slid into the seat and tried to act cool.

'Nice to see a familiar face.' he said and Derek nodded.

'Yeah.' he replied and ducked his head a little. 'Although I don't know if you're going to want to still be sitting there tomorrow. I tend to argue with the teacher a lot.'

'Dude.' Stiles beamed at him. 'That's like 90% of the fun.'

His joy was short lived though because the next moment two boys came in that he recognised from

outside and sat down in the back row on the other side. They looked at him and then at Derek and started whispering. Stiles knew he should ignore them but when he turned back to talk to Derek, he couldn't help but notice how tight Derek's jaw was clenched. He looked pretty damn pissed, truth be told.

'You really don't like them.' Stiles ventured, lowering his voice so they couldn't hear.

'Theo's an asshole but Donovan's really the one you want to watch out for.' Derek's voice was close to an actual growl and Stiles blinked in surprise. 'He's a violent prick who likes to hurt people.'

Stiles glanced back at the other two boys but the rest of the class was coming in, followed by a pretty woman with light brown hair. She looked almost twee in her sensible pencil skirt and blouse printed with tiny hearts. He noticed Derek sit up a bit, his nostrils flaring in that weird way they did. It was strangely cute and Stiles couldn't resist.

'Dude, are you sniffing the English teacher?' he hissed, grinning when Derek startled like he'd been caught looking at porn.

'She's new.' he muttered. 'And don't call me dude.'

Stiles barely resisted the urge to poke him with his pen. He didn't get a chance to reply because the new teacher was at the board, writing her name in graceful cursive across it.

'Good morning, everyone.' Even her voice was sweet. 'My name is Miss Blake and this is English Literature and Composition.'

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Peter hummed as he sorted through an order for a client that he was busy boxing up. On the counter, his phone vibrated and danced across the gleaming wooden top and he picked it up, peering at the screen quizzically when he saw it was Laura.

'Hey.' He leaned his elbows on the counter. 'Everything okay?'

'Not exactly.' Laura sounded like she was trying not to put her claws through the steering wheel. 'Duck season has come early this year.'

It was a stupid family joke. He and Talia had loved Loony Tunes when they were kids and the back and forth between Daffy and Bugs and the stupidity of Elmer Fudd had become an allegory for the real life hunters their parents warned them about. It had somehow trickled down to Laura and Derek and Cora through them and 'duck hunting' was now code for 'there are specieist assholes in town who want to blow us away', no matter if they were a small peaceful pack.

'Fuck me.' He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. 'How do you know?'

'The fucker came to the station.' Laura growled. 'His day is arms dealing. Cute, isn't it?'

'Shit.' Peter huffed. 'How many?'

'Well, that's the funny thing.' Laura replied. 'It's literally him and his daughter. Apparently a rogue alpha killed his father and bit his wife and they're after it. All in the name of protecting humans, of course and certainly not for revenge.'

'Of course not.' Peter's mouth quirked but there was no humour in it. 'Did you tell him our pack's

already been hunted into near extinction?’

‘I think he’s aware.’ Laura said. ‘He claimed that he used to live here when he was in high school.’

Peter straightened up abruptly, his blood running cold.

‘What is his name?’ he asked, praying that Laura couldn’t hear the way his heart had started racing over the phone.

‘Chris Argent.’ she replied. ‘Why? Do you know him?’

‘Yeah.’ Peter drawled, closing his eyes and pinching the bridge of his nose. ‘You could say that.’

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After English, Stiles and Derek went their separate ways, with a couple of grins and promises to meet for lunch.

‘I’ve got AP Spanish next.’ Derek shifted on his feet, his rubber soles squeaking on the linoleum floor. ‘You?’

‘Chemistry.’ Stiles said, squinting at his schedule.

‘Harris.’ Derek intoned like Stiles had told him he was going to be executed. ‘Don’t let him give you any shit. He doesn’t like people who are...different.’

His green eyes were steely when he said it and Stiles got the feeling it was from personal experience.

‘I won’t.’ He spotted Scott coming out the room and gestured at him. ‘I’m going to go catch up.’

‘Okay.’ Derek said. ‘I’ll see you later.’

Stiles watched him go, meeting up with Erica where she was getting something out of her locker before they walked off together, then jogged to get to Scott. It was a bit of a fight against the current though and he only managed to catch up to him as they got the classroom.

‘Hey.’ he said. ‘You want to sit together?’

‘Sure.’ Scott seemed to have warmed up a bit. They went in and took a middle bench. The teacher at the front was tall and thin, glasses perched on his nose. He took one look at Stiles and his mouth turned down in something close to a sneer.

‘Let me guess.’ His voice was openly hostile. ‘You were supposed to get on the bus to the juvenile remand centre and took a wrong turn.’

Stiles’s eyebrows tried to climb off his face. So far both Finstock and Miss Blake hadn’t batted an eyelid at him or the way he looked. In fact, Miss Blake had called on him several times in English and complimented him on his analysis of Scout Finch. He was used to getting shit from teachers, but Harris didn’t even know him and he was already looking at Stiles like he needed to be scraped off the bottom of his shoe.

It didn’t look like Chemistry was going to be much fun, something that was definitely compounded when Matt and Tracy made a reappearance and took the seats behind him and Scott.

‘Hey Scotty.’ Matt’s voice was as mean as his expression. ‘Who’s the tattooed freak?’

Stiles looked at Scott, expecting him to come to his defence but Scott just hunkered down, looking embarrassed. Hurt, he fixed his eyes on the board in front of him. Study hall couldn't come too quickly.

Chapter 6

Laura walked into the station feeling like she needed a shower. Chris had been polite enough but the whole basement had smelled like various strains of wolfsbane and other things she knew were used to hunt the supernatural and it made her skin crawl.

She got to her desk, glancing over to see Noah was in his office. He was at his desk, head slightly down and looking defeated and Laura frowned. She focused her senses and realised his heart rate was elevated. That, along with the closed door, didn't bode well. Curious, she cast around for something to use as an excuse, grabbing a scrap of paper quickly jotting down some details. She hadn't actually spoken to Marin yet, but maybe this was connected to why Noah looked so distraught.

Laura got up and walked over to the door, gently rapping on it with her knuckles. Noah visibly jumped, the lines in his face defined by what looked like a combination of exhaustion and barely concealed unhappiness. He schooled his expression into something blander and waved her in and Laura took a deep breath, steeling herself for what she knew was about to hit her in the nose. Her trepidation was validated when she opened the door. Noah's pheromones were sticky with guilt and distress and Laura wondered if it had to do with Stiles' accident or something else.

'Hey Boss.' She leaned in and smiled in what she hoped was a comforting manner. 'I just wanted to stop in and give you this.' She held up the piece of paper and Noah's brows knitted together.

'What is it?' he asked and Laura took the opportunity to go in and close the door behind her.

'The details you wanted.' she said, sitting down and handing them over. 'I also wanted to fill you in. We have a new gunsmith in town. I did his security check this morning.'

'Thank you.' Noah took the scrap of paper. He gave her a tight smile and Laura decided that she was going to stick her nose in.

'Is everything okay?' she asked. 'Are you worried after what happened to Stiles yesterday? I think it wasn't too bad, just a couple of grazed hands.'

Noah's expression changed to one of astonishment.

'What happened to Stiles?' he asked and it was Laura's turn to be confused.

'He fell while he was out running.' she explained. 'Derek found him and brought him back to our house to fix him up. I thought that's why you looked...less than happy.' She shrugged and then flinched when Noah went white and the anguish just started pouring off of him.

'Oh my God.' He sat back, his heart starting to gallop. 'Jesus Christ.'

'Um.' Laura didn't quite know what she'd started. 'Noah...?'

'I did something terrible.' Noah blurted out. 'I swear to God I have never ever lifted a hand to him before but I just...' He bit off whatever he was going to say. 'I lost my temper when he came back. I didn't know where he'd gone and I was worried and angry and every time he disappeared before he'd come back high or drunk, sometimes he never came back at all and I'd lie awake wondering if he was dead. I just lost control and he snapped at me and so I slapped him and I didn't even stop to notice that he was hurt.' He put his head in his hands. 'Fuck, I'm doing the worst possible job of parenting that I could possibly be doing right now.'

Laura was dumbstruck. This had not been what she anticipated but she could certainly sympathise.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'I didn't mean to pry.'

Noah huffed a humourless laugh into his hands and then looked at her, his grey eyes red rimmed.

'I hate myself right now,' he told her and Laura believed him. The stink of self-loathing was so thick she wanted to wrinkle her nose. 'I can't believe I did that. My dad used to smack me around and I swore to myself I would never become him and here I am, doing the same goddamn thing.'

Laura knew she had to do something, even if it was dishing out some tough love. Christ knew she'd gotten good at it with two teenage wolves in the house.

'Is this the first time?' she asked and Noah nodded. 'Alright. For what it's worth, that was a shitty thing to do but I know you know that already. The question is, are you willing to fix it?'

'I don't know how,' Noah sighed heavily, his shoulders drooping. 'It feels like we don't even know each other anymore. Every time we talk it ends in an argument. He told me yesterday that I can't even look at him without hating him because he reminds me of Claudia but that's not it. Every time I look at him I see the most precious thing in the world to me and knowing what he does to himself kills me because if I lost him I'd...' He let out a shuddering breath and Laura felt her own heart ache in kind. She knew the feeling.

'Can I give you some advice?' she asked gently and he looked at her, the naked gratitude in his eyes almost painful to see.

'I've been flying blind with him since Claudia died,' he replied. 'And I still don't know how to do it. So yeah, any advice would be welcome right now.'

Laura took a deep breath, thinking carefully about how to put things.

'After the fire, things were rough,' she said. 'Peter was injured and I was looking after Derek and Cora by myself for a few months. We were all grieving and heartbroken and I was struggling, I'll freely admit that.'

It was true, all of it. She'd been filled with her new alpha power and had no way to deal with it and things had gotten out of hand. Derek was anguished and guilt ridden and he'd challenged her one too many times and Laura had done what wolves did with ill mannered youngsters and disciplined him. It had been rough, too rough, and she knew she'd hurt him the moment he'd yelped. The gut wrenching regret she'd felt was mirrored in Noah's face.

'What did you do?' he asked and she sighed.

'I did something I regretted, much like you did,' she said. 'Afterwards, I couldn't even look at myself in the mirror I was so ashamed of what I'd done.'

Noah nodded.

'I wish I could take it back,' He scrubbed a hand over his face. 'I love my son more than anything. More than anyone. I've been doing a piss poor job of showing it though. I don't blame him for hating me.'

'I don't think he hates you,' Laura said softly. 'He's hurt and angry and you owe him a serious apology, but if you're sincere and meet him halfway I think you'll find he'll forgive you.'

'How do I get there though?' Noah said. 'He won't even talk to me.'

'You need to show him you're serious.' Laura thought back to what Peter had told her. 'Don't minimise his pain or his anger. He has a right to them. Apologise without making excuses. Then let him come to you.'

Noah met her eyes and gave her a small smile.

'For someone so young, you're very wise.' he remarked. 'Thank you.'

'I had to grow up quickly.' Laura explained. 'And there's no manual. We all fuck up. We're human.'

Most of the time her mind whispered, but Noah didn't need to know that yet.

-

Stiles stormed out of chemistry class without looking behind him. Scott had not endeared himself, stealing looks back at Matt and Tracy as if he was ashamed to be sitting next to Stiles and he'd had enough.

He ignored Scott calling him and headed into the throng of students, angry and feeling betrayed. He didn't even know where he was going and it was only when he walked into something the approximate size and density of an oak trunk that he looked up.

'Hey there.' Boyd was grinning at him but it vanished as soon as he caught Stiles' expression, his nostrils flaring in the same weird way Derek's did. Stiles was starting to wonder just what the hell was up with that. He knew he didn't smell that bad.

'It's nothing.' he muttered. 'Just people being assholes.'

'Not a surprise.' Boyd made a face. 'You going to class?'

'No, study hall.' Stiles replied.

'Cool.' Boyd steered him around. 'I know the best spots in the library. Nobody goes there and we can have an entire asshole-free period.'

Stiles couldn't really protest, mostly because Boyd was simply moving him along, but he was also feeling so grateful that someone was stepping up on his side. He fell into step beside Boyd and followed him down the stairs to the back of the school. The library was in a newer extension backlit by a huge window. The check-out desk was to the left and at the back was a raised dais and stairs to the mezzanine level.

'Come on.' Boyd led him to the back and Stiles breathed in the smell of books, smiling for the first time since chemistry.

'This is cool.' He grinned when Boyd took a table right at the back. 'I see you're a fellow fan of being unobtrusive.'

'Yeah.' Boyd sat down opposite him. 'It comes naturally. I used to be invisible.'

Stiles frowned.

'Not literally, I'm assuming.' he said and Boyd gave him a half-smile.

'Erica mentioned my sister this morning,' he replied. 'She disappeared five years ago. She'd be in the same year as Cora now.'

'That's rough, man.' Stiles couldn't even begin to contemplate what that was like.

'My parents went all out trying to find her.' Boyd relied, taking out his books. Stiles couldn't help noticing that he had a college level horticulture book and that definitely got him interested. 'That left very little time for me, even though I was still there. I got used to being by myself when I got to high school. I don't think I had a single friend until junior year. I ate lunch by myself every day. You'd be amazed at how easy it is for people not to notice you.'

His frank confession had Stiles nodding in sympathy.

'Scott's been my only real friend for a while now,' he confessed. 'Him acting like an asshole today is freaking me out.'

'Are you going to talk to him about it?' Boyd asked. 'I meant what I said before. Those guys are bad news.'

'I should.' Stiles huffed and opened his own books. As he did, his pendant swung out from his t-shirt and he saw Boyd catch sight of it. His dark eyes went wide and Stiles frowned. He held it up and squinted at it.

'Something wrong?' he asked and Boyd shook his head, still looking a little freaked.

'No,' he ventured. 'Where did you get it?'

'At my house.' Stiles replied, tucking it back into his shirt. 'Why?'

'It's just weird.' Boyd replied. 'Derek's got one just like it. He doesn't wear it often but I've seen it. He usually wears it on...' He stopped abruptly and Stiles was definitely intrigued.

'On what?' he pressed and Boyd looked a little shifty.

'Special days,' he replied, not managing to hide the fact that he was being evasive at all.

'Uh-huh, sure Jan.' Stiles narrowed his eyes at him. 'I should warn you, the Stilinski detective genes got passed down.'

'I'll remember that.' Boyd deadpanned and put his head down.

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Noah came out of his office, phone in hand. He wandered over to Laura's desk and she smiled up at him.

'This armourer, Chris Argent,' he said. 'Does he know anyone here?'

'Maybe.' Laura hedged. 'He said he used to live here.'

'Hmm.' Noah put his phone in his pocket. 'I just got a call from some department head down in Sacramento. He seemed very put out that Haigh wasn't in charge anymore. Told me that the Argents are old friends and that I need to afford them every courtesy. I believe those were his words.'

Laura's canines itched. She hated hunters and their corrupt little networks.

'Some people believe in old school networks.' She was trying to figure out how to explain it better but Noah raised an eyebrow and looked distinctly unimpressed.

'I'm familiar with those.' he said. 'I was in the army. Believe me, I'm familiar with people overstepping their authority. Unfortunately, shit like that is in every institution. In that case, I'll ignore it. I also wanted to ask you more about what happened on Saturday. You said Derek brought Stiles home?'

'Yes.' Laura smiled. 'I'm happy. Derek's got friends but they're pretty insular. It's good for him to hang out with someone new. Maybe, from what I've gleaned, Stiles could use some friends.'

'He could.' Noah admitted. 'He's lonely. His girlfriend was killed in a car crash about a year back and she'd pretty much been his best friend since kindergarten. He's never made friends easily. Scott doesn't seem to be a problem. He's already fallen in with a crowd that he met at the mall on Sunday. Melissa said it was all he could talk about last night.'

'That was fast.' Laura remarked. 'Who are they?'

'I don't know all of them but there's a kid called Theo and another one called Matt, maybe a girl as well?' Noah said and this time Laura had to work really hard to keep her claws and fangs in, her anger welling up. She was protective of her pack and what Erica and Derek had both gone through because of those little shits sometimes made her wish she wasn't a deputy so she could mete out some werewolf justice. Noah picked up on her tension immediately and looked questioningly at her. 'Did I say something wrong?'

'Not exactly.' Laura had to breathe in deeply so she didn't growl. 'But there are some things you should know about the crowd your step-son is hanging out with.'

-

Boyd left him a little before the end of the period and Stiles decided to make his way to his next class via the bathrooms. He kept his head down and made an executive decision to get some phone numbers so he could call for help if he got horribly lost.

In the boy's room he chose a cubicle at the end and took a moment to catch his breath, his mind still racing. Boyd had been genuinely surprised to see the pendant and Stiles could not imagine why the hell Derek would have the same kind. The one he was wearing must have been his mother's or grandmother's.

He was still thinking about it when he came out and went to wash his hands, so engrossed that he didn't notice the door opening and who was coming in until he was being flanked on each side.

'Hey there, fresh meat.' Theo's smile was smug and ever so slightly menacing. 'So Scott says you suck dick.'

That brought Stiles up short.

'You're so full of shit.' He glared at Theo, edging back when Donovan crowded him. 'He wouldn't say that.'

'Well, not exactly.' Theo's smile widened. 'But he did say you're bi and everyone knows what sluts you bi guys are. So I'm just extrapolating.'

'Well, you can extrapolate the fuck off.' Stiles snapped. 'And believe me, after what I've heard I wouldn't touch your dick with a ten foot pole.'

‘You’ve been hanging with Hale and his pet freaks.’ Theo moved to block him in as Stiles attempted to get past him. ‘He’s another one. Bi as fuck and likes to act the fucking frigid virgin when we all know he’s probably getting his ass reamed by all of them.’

‘Yeah?’ Stiles was now angry and getting angrier. He squared up, getting right in Theo’s face. ‘I say you’re still sore because he turned you the fuck down, asshole. Probably because he didn’t want to bother with your microdick.’

It was clearly the wrong thing to say because the next thing, Stiles had one arm twisted behind him and was being slammed face first into the wall, Theo and Donovan pinning him so he couldn’t move. He struggled, but he’d never been that built and both of them obviously worked out enough that they could hold him in place.

‘Bitch.’ Theo hissed in his ear. ‘How about I show you just how big my dick is, and then Donovan can have my sloppy seconds.’

‘Fuck off.’ Stiles snarked, managing to get one arm between him and the wall. He moved quickly, throwing his head back so he hit Donovan square in the face. Donovan squawked and fell back, holding his face as blood gushed from his nose. Stiles grinned viciously and twisted so Theo had to really work to keep him immobilised. His arm hurt like it was about to snap clean through and Stiles was just thinking rather hysterically how he would explain away a broken arm when the bathroom door flew open and the next thing, Theo was flying through the air into the opposite wall, hitting with a dull thud. He slid down to sprawl near the still whining Donovan and Stiles turned to see his rescuer standing there. If he’d thought Derek had done a good job looking scary before, it was nothing compared to what he was doing now. His pale green eyes were blazing and his hands were clenched into fists, every inch of him looming over Theo and Donovan.

‘You stay the fuck away from him.’ It was growled rather than spoken. ‘Or I’m going to hand both your asses to you.’

‘Jesus, Hale!’ Theo was trying to get up. ‘You’re a fucking psycho!’

‘Whatever, pencil dick.’ Derek jabbed a very angry finger at him. ‘You stay away from Stiles or I’m going to make sure you’re never able to sexually harass anyone ever again. You and your monosyllabic brain dead sycophant.’

Stiles just stared at him, his heart sprinting and his eyes wide. Derek stepped back, snorted and picked up Stiles abandoned backpack before grabbing him by the arm and dragging him out the bathroom.

‘Okay, so that was epic.’ he babbled, barely managing to keep his footing. Derek was stupidly strong but then again it was to be expected seeing as he’d literally tossed Theo across the bathroom like a rag-doll. ‘Dude, you’re like the Incredible Hulk!’

‘I’m not green, Stiles.’ Derek deadpanned. ‘And you need to watch out for him. Theo’s idea of consent is sticking his hand down your pants and claiming you asked for it.’

‘You’re speaking from experience I take it.’ Stiles said, holding up a mollifying hand when Derek made the growling noise again. ‘Erica told me.’

‘He tried to force me to suck his cock in the locker room shower.’ Derek snorted. ‘I grabbed his balls and twisted them so hard they nearly came off and told him I wasn’t going to be taking part in his prison shower fantasy role play he had planned.’

'Nice.' Stiles beamed at him. 'He called you frigid. He also called me a bisexual slut.'

'He's still pissed because I said no.' Derek grumbled. 'And he's got an eye for pretty so just watch the fuck out and don't hesitate to call me if you need help. The really funny thing is that he'll swear blind he's straight to anyone who asks.'

'Gross.' Stiles said cheerfully. 'So he's one of those.'

'He's one of those.' Derek agreed. 'Now come on. Lydia said you've got lunch this period.'

'I do.' Stiles was delighted. 'I'm assuming you do too?'

'Of course.' Derek smirked at him. 'I'll even let you copy my notes from English if you ask nicely.'

'Screw you, big guy.' Stiles shoved him in the shoulder, huffing when Derek didn't so much as move. 'Dude, what the fuck do you lift?'

'More than your entire body weight.' Derek gave him a toothy grin. 'And don't call me dude.'

'Yeah, yeah.' Stiles snickered. 'Hey, do you think they'll go to the principal?'

'Probably.' Derek shrugged. 'But if that happens, you weren't there. Okay?'

'And let you get detention all on your lonesome?' Stiles snorted. 'No way. Besides, if I'm going to be part of your clique of losers, I need to start building up my rep.'

Derek stopped to look at him and Stiles thought maybe he'd crossed a line, judging from Derek's Eyebrows of Doom. But then they softened and Derek burst out laughing and Stiles was momentarily blinded. Derek laughed with his whole body, clutching at his stomach and bending over slightly.

Stiles couldn't help grinning madly at him, caught up in his laughter.

'Yeah yeah, laugh it up fuzzball.' he said and Derek finally straightened up.

'You like Star Wars?' he asked and Stiles nearly vibrated in excitement.

'Of course.' he replied. 'I've been trying to get Scott to watch it forever but he's too much of a pleb.'

'I might have the original series unedited on DVD.' Derek said and he was smiling shyly. 'If you ever wanted to come over and watch them.'

'Yes please.' Stiles was pretty sure he was about to float away on a cloud of happiness. 'I'd love that.'

'Cool.' Derek said. He held out a hand. 'Give me your phone.'

Stiles did, bouncing just the tiniest bit while Derek typed his number in.

'Now you can call if you need help.' he said. 'Or if you want to watch Star wars.'

'Cool.' Stiles was lost, staring at him. He'd have to apologise for calling Scott lovestruck because he was pretty sure that's what was happening to him. He wanted to say something witty or memorable but then he was pretty much bowled over by Lydia and Erica.

'There you are!' Lydia said. 'I've been looking for you.' She took hold of Stiles' arm. 'Let's go introduce you to the joys of BHHS' lunch menu.'

'I wouldn't.' Derek made a disgusted face. 'That stuff all smells like chemicals.'

Stiles frowned at him.

'You can smell the chemicals in the food?' he asked and Derek looked even shiftier than Boyd had.

'My parents raised us on an organic diet.' he said. 'And my senses are just stupid sharp.'

Stiles glanced at the others but they were doing that blank face thing that Boyd had done in the library when he'd deflected Stiles' curiosity about the pendant. That distracted him and he snuck a discreet look but there was no telltale outline under Derek's tank, just smooth tanned skin that did not make his mouth water, thank you very much.

Isaac was at a table at the back of the canteen when they got there. He was with Cora, who was slumped over with her head on the table.

'Der.' she whined, pouting at her brother and drawing out his name far longer than she should have been able to. 'I hate it. Everyone is so freaking juvenile.'

'Sucks to be you.' Derek grinned and mussed up her hair, making her bat a pathetic hand at him.

They set everything down and Stiles dug out his wallet to go get food. He noticed then that Cora and Derek were taking out lunch packs. Cora had an extra one which she handed over to Isaac. Lydia was taking out a dainty glass bowl with plastic lid full of salad and a pot of what looked like really fancy organic yogurt.

'You guys don't eat the canteen food?' he asked.

'Oh, I do.' Erica grinned and steered him in the direction of the counter. 'I'm not weak like these poor slobs.'

'Great.' Stiles followed her. 'What do you recommend?'

'The mini pizzas.' Erica was eyeing the food display like a hungry shark. 'Here.' she lobbed a tray at him and herded him into line in front of her, then proceeded to stack his tray with the aforementioned mini pizzas, a cup of fruit cocktail, an apple and a milk. 'There, basic food groups covered.'

'I like your style.' Stiles returned the grin. Erica got the same and they headed back to find Jackson and Danny had joined them. A few minutes later, Boyd ambled up and took out what looked like a veritable tub of tuna pasta bake and got stuck in. Stiles did a little snooping in Derek's lunch, finding sandwiches layered with extra thick roast beef and fresh tomato that still smelled like they'd just been picked.

'Peter.' Derek explained, seeing the way Stiles was eyeing them. 'We bring lunch for Isaac because he always forgets to eat otherwise.'

'Laura just likes feeding me.' Isaac said with his mouth full.

'You need it.' Erica crunched into her apple, bright red and shiny like her lips.

'Oh, there's Allison.' Lydia waved and they all turned to see her standing there looking a little lost. Her face brightened when she spotted them and came over.

'Hi.' She did a quick sweep of the table and the way she did it had Stiles getting that odd feeling about her again. It had felt almost military in its precision, kind of like the way his dad swept any place they went into out of force of habit. He pondered where she might have picked that up and then noticed that everyone, apart from Danny and Lydia, had stiffened and was looking back at her intently.

'Everyone, this is Allison Argent.' Lydia said, although she seemed to have picked up the odd change in mood and was frowning a little. 'Allison, this is Isaac, Boyd, Erica, Cora, Jackson, Danny and Derek.' She pointed everyone out as she spoke. 'And you've already met Stiles.'

'Derek and Cora?' Allison asked. 'As in Hale?'

'Yeah.' Derek's expression had completely shut down and Stiles felt for him. It had to be super shitty to have something like that hanging over your head all the time. Next to him, Cora was barely keeping a straight face. Stiles didn't need to know her that well to tell she was seething on the inside. 'What of it?'

He was staring straight at Allison and she did another of those quick sweeps of the table, something settling into her expression that looked like realisation.

'Nothing.' she finally replied. 'I'm just here to study. Like you are. I'm not looking to cause any trouble.'

It was an odd choice of words and Stiles was completely bemused by why she'd said it, but then the weirdest thing happened. Everyone at the table who'd been on edge all seemed to relax and settle back into themselves.

'Oh.' Lydia said and Stiles looked at her, finding her checking Allison out with an expression that had turned sharp and assessing. 'I didn't know.'

'I don't advertise it.' Allison said softly. 'May I sit down?'

This was addressed to Derek and he inhaled and then nodded once, brusque like he'd been with Stiles when he'd fallen over.

'Yeah.' he said. 'You're welcome to sit with us.'

Allison gave him a wary smile and sat down. Stiles looked between her and the others, seeing the way they were all checking each other out.

'Thank you.' She reached into her backpack and took out an extra large bag of chips, placing them on the table. 'My contribution.'

There was silence and then Lydia burst out laughing.

'At least she knows the rules.' she cackled and that seemed to be the sign for everyone else to join in. Stiles was still completely lost and leaned over to Jackson, who was on his other side.

'I didn't bring anything.' he hissed and Jackson smirked and gave him a gentle shove.

'You don't need to.' he whispered back. 'The Hales have already decided you're in the Pack.'

'The pack?' Stiles asked and this time it was Derek who answered, his green eyes glinting.

'Yeah.' He leaned back, still holding Allison's gaze. 'That's what they call us here. The Wolf Pack, isn't that right Erica?

'It's the leather jackets.' Erica snickered, giving Allison a look like she wanted to eat her.

'No, it's the way you look like you're about to eat anyone that fucks with you.' Danny was grinning.

'It's a good name.' Allison said. She was holding her own against Derek's stare quite comfortably. 'It suits you.'

'Not all of us are wolves though.' Lydia was smiling, her eyes sparkling with mischief. 'Some of us just consort with them.'

'You'll have to educate me.' Allison spoke to her, now with a brilliant genuine smile. 'I love to learn.' Now her brown eyes moved to Stiles. 'What about him?'

'That's easy.' Derek's arm snuck across the back of Stiles' chair. 'He's one of us. That's all you need to know.'

'But he's also new.' Allison said and Stiles leaned into her line of sight.

'Can we all stop talking about me like I'm not here?' he asked. 'And can we maybe clarify what the fuck just went on because I'm kind of lost.'

'Okay, but later.' Derek said, gently bumping him. 'You need to eat your mini pizzas before they congeal.'

'Don't think you can distract me with food, mister.' Stiles grumbled but Derek was right, so he did.

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Laura got a message just after lunch. She read it and her eyebrows went up.

Duck season at school? Derek's texts were consummate examples of brevity. Laura grinned and tapped out a reply.

Met her dad today. All above board and following Code. They need help tracking someone.

Derek texted back almost immediately.

Who?

Laura debated telling him all the details and then decided that forewarned was forearmed.

There's an unwanted guest in BH. Alpha. Be careful and come straight home after practice. Bring the pack. And pack adjacent. We'll need everyone on board.

She put her phone back in her pocket and thought about her conversation with Peter and Lydia. An alpha on the loose was no laughing matter, especially one as dangerous and powerful as Ennis. She decided to make a couple of calls to Deucalion and Satomi after her shift. They would need to be informed and could probably offer advice.

Until then, it wouldn't hurt to have her pack on their guard.

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Derek, Stiles discovered, could be very elusive if he wanted to be.

After the weirdness at lunch, which ended with oddly formal goodbyes from Allison and the Hale siblings, they'd all gone their separate ways for classes once more. Stiles ended up in AP World History by himself and it gave him plenty of time to contemplate what the hell was going on because he'd already read the module the teacher was working through.

He started by writing down everything that had happened since he'd arrived in Beacon Hills, starting with the house and its idiosyncrasies, moving to the shared symbols on the pillars and lintel. Derek had called it family magic and Stiles discreetly googled the symbols under his desk and wrote down their meanings. The triskelion had several but the others were all by and large symbols of protection. Then he turned to the plants in his grandmother's greenhouse. Some had been culinary but there were also a lot that were used in herbalism and had so-called magical properties. Finally there was the pendant. Stiles knew without a doubt that the moon was associated with magic and witchcraft and then it hit him.

'Of course,' he muttered to himself. It all made sense, the organic diet and the clannishness and the 'special days'. He texted one handed, feeling immensely pleased that he'd figured it out.

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Derek felt his phone buzz and glanced at Erica and Boyd. They were all in Biology, listening to the teacher drone on about the endocrine system. Boyd raised an eyebrow and Derek eased the phone out and checked it, expecting it to be Laura.

The message from Stiles had him biting his lip, trying desperately not to laugh.

'What?' Erica hissed and he passed it to her, watching as she put a hand over her mouth to keep the giggles in. She leaned over to Boyd, whispering in his ear and then handed the phone back and Derek read the message again.

So, I'm going to go out on a limb and say Paganism. Am I right? I'm so right, aren't I? Dude, you could have just said. It's not like I'm going to judge.

Derek snickered to himself as he replied. They'd have to be far more careful in future. Stiles had no idea just how close he was.

You got me. We all dance around naked on the full moon and celebrate Yule. People think we're nuts.

Well, it wasn't a complete lie. Sure it wasn't so much dancing as running and he was usually covered in fur, but the bitten betas were naked. Yule had always been celebrated by his family and they still continued the tradition. Stiles seemed to have had no connection to his magic as far as Peter could tell and he'd made sure that Derek promised not to let the cat out of the bag. So far, only he and Laura and Lydia were in on the secret and it was going to stay that way until Peter had had a chance to broach the subject with Stiles.

Derek didn't know much about magic. Aneta had been kind and worked with Laura and Peter but he'd never really spent that much time with her. Peter had said that Stiles was a Spark but Derek had only the haziest idea of what that actually was. Peter had said it explained his scent but he hadn't enlightened Derek as to why it was so alluring, making him want to roll around in it and he hadn't volunteered that information. It was bad enough his whole family had figured out he liked

Stiles without them teasing him for being so nose-struck already.

‘Pagans.’ Boyd was shaking his head, still grinning, and Erica’s shoulders were shaking.

He decided to let them laugh. Laura’s reply about the alpha gatecrashing Beacon Hills was not good news at all. Allison being a hunter was just as bad. They’d all smelled the wolfsbane on her, the scents of gun oil and gunpowder practically soaked into her clothing. Lydia didn’t have their senses and even Jackson’s were hindered by how he had to behave in public. He had to taste the air to scent it and that would just raise more questions than was worth it which was probably why he hadn’t picked it up earlier. Being a kanima had certain advantages but the disadvantages were a bitch. Derek would take being a wolf any day.

Allison’s attitude had been surprising as was her assurance that she was just there to go to school and wasn’t going to be causing trouble. Her heartbeat had been completely steady, no trace of duplicity as far as any of them could tell. She clearly knew who they were and had made her approach correctly according to protocol. The explanation that they were hunting a rogue made her actions understandable. She was offering an alliance and apparently so was her father.

Derek wondered what her story was. Under her perfume, cunningly blended to hide a lot of her chemosignals but not all of them, she smelled sad and angry but hid it incredibly well. It was a lot like Stiles.

Derek sighed and flicked a claw against his phone, debating whether he should try and give Stiles a better explanation. He was going to Peter’s for his first shift after school and Derek eventually decided against it. He’d need to go to basketball practice and this kind of conversation required everyone to be in the know.

It would have to wait until later.

After class they started making their way towards the gym. Coach MacReynolds was a stickler for them being on time to practice and Derek took his duties as team captain seriously. The fact that it provided fuel for the never ending and sometimes rabid rivalry between Finstock and Mac (a much better nickname than Cupcake as far as Derek was concerned) was entertaining.

He did keep half an eye out for Stiles, catching his scent in the corridor leading to the gym but no actual sight of him. Derek wasn’t too concerned, after all Stiles would be spending the afternoon with Peter and his uncle was a strong and capable wolf, more than able to hold his own against an alpha.

Boyd and Isaac had the lockers next to him and they got changed in silence. They often did that, none of them given to idle chatter. Derek pulled his shirt over his head, stretching out his shoulders and cracking his neck. He was still thinking about Stiles and by the time he managed to get his kit out, sighing happily to himself at how he’d gone in and kicked Theo’s ass for getting anywhere near Stiles, he found Boyd and Isaac both dressed and giving him twin looks of amusement.

‘What?’ he asked and they exchanged glances.

‘Nothing.’ Isaac said. ‘Just wondering who the fuck you are and what you’ve done with Derek.’

‘Oh fuck off.’ Derek ducked his head and felt his ears heating up.

‘Seriously, man.’ Boyd was smirking, which was most unlike him and showed that he was extremely tickled by what was going on. ‘You’re actually smiling. I’m starting to look around for the impending apocalypse.’

‘Well, you might actually get it.’ Derek said. ‘There’s something I need to tell you guys.’ He cocked his head, listening. The rest of the team was already out but they knew to give him and the others space.

‘What?’ Isaac was curious. ‘Besides’s the fact that we’ve got a duck in school?’

‘Yeah.’ Boyd nodded, turning serious. ‘That was a surprise.’

‘We’re helping.’ Derek leaned back against his locker. ‘There’s another alpha in town. Not a very nice one, either.’

‘Shit.’ Isaac’s scent immediately turned stressed. He was the jumpiest of all of them, understandably so, and he moved closer to Boyd instinctively. If Laura had been there, he would have been right at her shoulder, probably rubbing his cheek on it and getting her scent on him for reassurance.

‘We’re going to my place after practice.’ Derek said. ‘All of us. Laura wants us to have a game plan.’

‘Got it.’ Boyd replied, steering Isaac in front of him as they left the locker room. ‘You’re going to have to sit on Erica though. You know how my girl likes a fight.’

‘Jesus.’ Derek looked heavenward. ‘We’re probably going to have to tie her up and put her in the basement.’

He said it quietly but it was still loud enough to carry over to where Erica was in the stands on the far side. She instantly looked up and glared at them all.

‘Shit, she’s on to us.’ Isaac moved behind Boyd. Erica was easily the most aggressive of all of them and could beat their asses any day of the week when the mood took her.

‘Good.’ Derek refused to be cowed. ‘Then she can get her ass over to the lacrosse field and tell Jackson and Danny to be at the pack house after practice.’

Erica narrowed her eyes at him then huffed and got up, casually throwing him the finger as she went on her errand. Jackson and Danny were not technically Laura’s wolves, being kanima and human respectively, but Jackson’s status as Peter’s illegitimate son (not that anyone knew apart from the pack - that had been a whole other story) meant he was included in pack business and where Jackson went, so did Danny. He was also indispensable because even though he was human, he had mad hacking skills that definitely came in useful.

Derek grinned as a basketball was lobbed at him, effortlessly flicking it up to spin on one finger. They weren’t a normal pack by any stretch of the imagination but that alpha was going to be in for one hell of a surprise if it tried to mess with them.

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Stiles crossed the parking lot, huffing because his search for Derek had come up empty. He was dying to ask questions, all his unbridled curiosity about what kinds of things Derek’s family did eating away at him. At least he could prod Peter for answers once he got to the shop.

He did slow down at one point, seeing Lydia and Allison standing at a small mint green Fiat. They were talking but the serious looks on their faces made him divert from going over. He had not idea what the topic of conversation was, but he didn’t want to interrupt or be late for his first shift so he went straight to the jeep and got in. They were still going when he drove past them and Stiles did

try to make out if they were arguing but gave up when he almost rear ended another car.

He was also still giddy from his interactions with Derek and the heroics in the bathroom. There had been no call from the principal so Stiles assumed that Theo and Donovan were probably going to plot some kind of serious payback (assholes like them always did). At least he now had people to have his back, especially with Scott's defection.

He parked around the back of the shop when he got there like Peter told him to and came around the front to find his new employer on the sidewalk, eyeing the sign.

'How are you with painting?' he asked without saying hello but Stiles was like that himself and he just smiled and went to stand next to him. Peter's white v-neck was scandalously low and he smelled of expensive cologne and Stiles couldn't help smirking at the thought of him up a ladder.

'I'm assuming you want me to do the dirty work.' he said and Peter chuckled.

'It's literally why I hired you.' he replied and motioned for Stiles to go inside.

There was a large pile of books on the small table they'd used the last time he was there.

'Those are new stock.' Peter said. 'You can shelve them and then I need to go out for a couple of hours. I'm expecting a few pickups, nothing too difficult.'

He ran Stiles through the cash register, the books awaiting collection and the shelving system then grabbed his jacket and left.

Stiles took his time shelving the new volumes, breathing in deeply and having a grand old time. He couldn't believe he was being paid to be there and he used the time to have a good nose around. The books were fascinating and by the time Stiles came back down to the cash desk, he was humming happily to himself.

He pottered around, waiting for Peter to come back so he could interrogate him. There was a weird little itch happening under his skin though and Stiles absently scratched at his arm. It was the part of this tattoo that was marked by the climbing leaves with their chrysanthemum blossoms. His artist had done them in the traditional style, the petals curving inwards. He'd also chosen them because they had been his mother's favourite flowers. She'd happily eschewed the more expensive flowers, her face lighting up whenever she saw them.

He ignored it for a while, looking around for something to do. The back room was open and he leaned back on the stool to see what was in there. It was mostly stock, boxes and a couple of larger shelves. Stiles eventually gave in and stuck his head inside the door, taking a couple of steps inside and having a look around.

He discovered that the large bookshelf to the right was locked, tantalising titles catching his attention through the glass doors. There were a lot of volumes with weird mystical sounding titles and Stiles wondered if he could convince Peter to show him some later. The shelves on the right were open, books stacked there for collection or packaging judging by the slips of paper sticking out the tops with customers' names on them. The boxes seemed to be stacked haphazardly and Stiles was busy inspecting them when he heard a very clear snick in the quiet of the shop. He wheeled around and then stared, blinked a couple of times and then stared again.

The bookshelf behind him had definitely been locked. Stiles had checked. Twice.

Now one of the glazed doors was standing open and that was just plain creepy. A shiver ran down his spine and Stiles looked around him, feeling a combination of unwillingness to get himself into

trouble when he'd literally just started his job there and an overwhelming desire to see what was inside the cabinet.

He took a couple of tentative steps forward and then jumped like a startled fawn when a book tumbled off the top shelf and landed on the floor in front of him.

'Crap.' Stiles clutched at his chest, heart pounding. He eyed the book. It wasn't one that had caught his attention earlier. It was not a book in the traditional sense, more a journal in a plain leather cover that folded over and secured with a brass lock, much like an old fashioned diary.

Stiles crouched down and gently ran a finger over the cover and then recoiled instantly when he felt the same tingle as before at the house, like a mild electric shock. He fell over onto his ass, staring at the journal. The urge to pick it up was almost physical and his hand stretched out before Stiles even knew what he was doing. He was just about to pick it up when a shadow fell across him and he yelped and scuttled backwards.

'It wasn't me!' he blurted out. 'I promise!. The door opened by itself and that fell out and I was just going to put it back, I swear!' He sat there, breathing light and panicky as he expected Peter to yell at him or tell him to get the fuck out.

It astonished him when Peter came to crouch next to him, a completely unreadable expression on his face. He reached out, picking up the book and handling it like it was precious.

'Do you know what this is?' he asked and Stiles shook his head frantically.

'No.' He wrung his hands. 'Is it expensive?'

'No.' Peter smiled and the sadness in it was heartbreaking. 'But it is priceless.' He looked up at Stiles and there were tears in his eyes. 'And it's obviously decided that it's time for you to find out.'

Stiles was caught up in confusion and a growing feeling of being out of his depth.

'Find out what?' he asked.

Peter stood up and held out a hand to him.

'To find out what you really are, Stiles.' he said. 'And more importantly, what you could become.'

Chapter 7

Derek loped along the court, dribbling the ball before passing it to Boyd. Boyd took the shot almost lazily, getting it in the basket. He came over and they bumped fists, hanging behind as the rest of the team headed for the showers.

‘So.’ He gave Derek a look. ‘I saw something interesting today.’

‘Yeah?’ Derek said, moving backwards. ‘What?’

‘Stiles was wearing a necklace.’ Boyd said and Derek raised an eyebrow at him. ‘One that looks just like yours.’

‘Can’t be.’ he replied. ‘My mom gave me that. She said she had it made for me.’

‘I’m serious, man.’ Boyd said, falling into step with him. ‘It’s exactly the same. Smelled different though. Kind of like static. You know, like...’

‘Before a storm.’ Derek finished for him. ‘That’s what Stiles smells like to me.’

‘Yeah.’ Boyd gave him a sidelong look. ‘Kind of weird.’

‘No shit.’ Derek’s mind was racing. He didn’t want to tell Boyd what Peter had told him about Stiles, but it was interesting that he’d picked up his scent.

He thought about it while they showered. The necklace had been a tenth birthday present and his own special gift from his alpha. Every wolf got one, although the types of gifts varied. Laura’s had been a twisted silver bangle set with a pair of moonstones in the shape of crescent moons. Cora’s had been a small silver jewellery box with a border of triskelions that now sat on her dressing table. Peter’s was a leather cuff with a silver wolf with topaz eyes set into it. Every gift was unique and the knowledge that Stiles apparently had one just like his was baffling.

He really needed to talk to Laura about it.

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Peter set down the tray and sat down opposite him and Stiles watched as he poured out tea from a proper teapot into proper china cups.

‘My mother used to insist on proper tea.’ he said conversationally. ‘So did your grandmother. It was one of the things they used to do together, along with terrorising the Beacon Hills Town Committee.’ He looked up and then nodded at the cup he’d placed in front of Stiles. ‘Try it.’

Stiles hesitated. His headache was back with a vengeance and when he reached out his hands were shaking. He folded them in his lap instead and then startled when Peter reached over and put his hand on Stiles’ knee. It was overly warm even through the denim and Stiles remembered the way Derek had touched him and shivered.

‘Sorry.’ he muttered. ‘I’m kind of fucking up everywhere today.’

‘Your heart is racing.’ Peter said, now looking concerned. ‘You seem like you’re in pain.’

‘It’s my head.’ Stiles had never confessed to anything before but it was all just coming out. ‘I have these really bad headaches. And the shakes. Sometimes I lose time.’ He glanced up, feeling

everything inside him stretching. 'I think I may be getting sick like my mom.'

Peter's face changed.

'You're not sick, Stiles,' he said gently. 'This is part of what I want to talk to you about.'

'You said I need to know what I am,' Stiles frowned, rubbing at his temple. 'What did you mean?'

'Exactly what I said,' Peter sat back and sighed. 'I've realised that you really know nothing about your family or its legacy or how it's entangled with the Hales.'

'Things have been happening since I got here,' Stiles gripped his elbows, pulling himself into himself. 'Weird shit. Maybe you'll understand or at least not think I'm nuts.' He looked up at Peter. 'Was my family pagan?'

'Pagan?' Peter looked bemused. 'What are you talking about?'

'I figured it out today, after talking to Boyd and thinking about stuff,' Stiles shrugged. 'It's no big deal. I'm cool with it. But now I'm wondering if it's connected.'

'Okay, hang on,' Peter's mouth was quirked. 'Why do you think we're pagans?'

'You live out way in the preserve. Derek and Cora have this whole food of the earth thing going on. The symbols on your house. And Boyd said that you guys have special days and that Derek wears his necklace on them so I just figured it out.'

'His necklace?' Peter was still looking like he wasn't following.

'Yeah,' Stiles pulled out his and showed him. 'Boyd says Derek has one just like it. I found this in my grandmother's greenhouse, which is full of stuff that's used in herbalism.'

Peter was staring at the necklace and then leaned forward again, tracing a fingertip over the moons. He looked like he'd seen a ghost.

'How...?' He let go and then nodded at the journal, lying next to the tea tray. 'Okay, I'm going to just come right out and say it. Stiles, your grandmother as a witch.'

'Oh so I was right about the Wicca?' Stiles was now using the heel of his hand against his temple, the pain turning sharp and distracting.

'Not exactly,' Peter put his teacup down, gave Stiles an assessing look and then removed the whole tray, placing it carefully on the floor behind him. 'Aneta was different. She had some very profound knowledge. Knowledge that should have been passed on to you. What do you know about where her family came from?'

'I know they were Polish, like my dad,' Stiles gritted his teeth, wincing. 'Okay, I'm sorry to ask but do you have an Advil or Tylenol or something.'

'Actually I have something better,' Peter smiled and got up. 'Do you trust me?'

Stiles considered and then nodded. Peter had been nothing but nice to him so far. He sat and watched as Peter moved to stand behind him.

'Close your eyes,' he instructed and Stiles did, making a pained noise when Peter's overly warm hands came to rest on either side of his head, putting pressure on his temples with the heels of his hands. At first it felt much worse but then the pain started to ease. It was like having cool water

poured over sunburn. Stiles blew out a deep breath, every muscle in his body unclenching.

‘How are you doing that?’ he asked. He felt oddly euphoric and lightheaded.

‘Acupressure.’ Peter replied and removed his hands. ‘Okay, so this may be hereditary. However, I can definitely say that it is not the same thing that made your mom sick. For one, you’re way too young. For another, let’s just say there’s a fix for this. And also an explanation for all the other things you mentioned.’

‘Are you sure.’ Stiles tipped his head back, peering at him. ‘Also, I can see up your nose.’ He giggled. ‘Shit, I feel high.’

‘Hmmm.’ Peter patted him on the shoulder and came back around. ‘Now you have some homework.’ He picked up the journal and handed it to Stiles. ‘If you want to know more, I suggest you start reading this.’

‘But it’s locked.’ Stiles protested, getting up and wavering a bit on his feet. ‘Damn, you should be working as a masseuse and not as a bookseller.’

‘I considered it, but I look awful in those ugly uniforms.’ Peter replied and turned him in the direction of the door. ‘Do I need to call your dad to get you?’

‘No, I’ll be fine.’ Stiles was starting to feel a whole lot better. ‘Wednesday?’

‘Actually I think you should come by tomorrow.’ Peter walked him to the front door. ‘I think you’ll have questions.’

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Laura pulled up outside the house and sat for a moment to collect herself. She’d been agitated all day, the thought of another alpha encroaching on her territory absolutely maddening. She growled angrily and pulled her claws out of the steering wheel cover (she had a habit of going through them and kept a small supply in the hallway closet) and opened her door. She could see Erica’s truck parked on the far side of the house, along with Jackson’s Porsche. Lydia’s Fiat was missing but that didn’t surprise her too much. Lydia wasn’t one to stick to a schedule and if she was late, she’d have a good reason for it.

Her pack’s voices and heartbeats were a welcome balm on her nerves as she got to the porch, stopping to reach up and brush the protective symbols with her fingertips. There was a little surge of power and Laura went inside.

They were all in the living room, draped across every available surface. Boyd and Erica were on one couch, Danny and Jackson on the other, Isaac had his long legs over the arm of Peter’s favourite armchair with Cora in his lap and Derek was on the floor in front of them, his sister’s one leg draped over his shoulder and his hand wrapped around her ankle. They all looked at her as she came in, their eyes flashing gold in reply to Laura’s red. She could smell their tension, her pack bond to them thrumming with barely suppressed anticipation.

‘Where’s Peter?’ she asked, flopping down into the other armchair that they’d left empty for her.

‘On his way.’ Derek replied. He was chewing on a claw and Cora kicked at his hand to make him stop.

‘Lydia’s not here either.’ she said and Jackson looked up from his phone.

'She's on her way.' he replied. 'She was talking to the duckling.'

There were snorts all round and Laura smiled.

'Okay, so here's what I know.' she started. 'There are two hunters in town - Chris and Allison Argent. They check out in terms of being law abiding at least, no warrants or citations. I'll have to call Deucalion and Satomi later to confirm their other credentials but their story checks out. There are two reported deaths for Gerard and Victoria Argent, both recorded as animal attacks on a hunting trip. The details aren't pretty.'

'How not pretty?' Boyd asked, pulling Erica in closer and Laura grimaced.

'Let's just say the word dismemberment was used.' she replied. 'Apparently they had to use dental records to identify them.'

'Shit.' Isaac whistled through his teeth. 'And the alpha?'

'They say his name is Ennis.' Laura replied. 'But that's where I'm having a problem with their story. Everytime Chris said him or he, his heartbeat stuttered. It was barely noticeable and he's obviously been trained to hide things from wolves but I'd bet my right boob that the person they say they're looking for is not the person they're looking for.'

'I haven't smelled anything either.' Derek said. 'If there's an alpha, they haven't been sniffing around.'

'Not necessarily an indication.' Laura replied. 'Remember how Mom could mask her scent? If this is a strong experienced alpha, they could be doing it too.'

'So if it's not a dude, then who?' Erica asked, leaning forward. Her dark eyes glittering and Laura could smell that she was excited at the prospect of a challenge. 'Do you know any female alphas apart from Satomi who might be around?'

'I have some ideas.' Laura replied. 'Either way, we're going on alert. From now on, none of you are to be alone. That means going to school together, sticking in groups after school and no more solitary walks.' She directed this last at Derek and saw how he instantly pouted. 'I mean it, Derek. I don't want this alpha to get the drop on any of us.' There was murmured assent and she relaxed, knowing they could be trusted. 'Now, I say we order in and eat and start ironing out what we're going to do to make sure that fucker doesn't breach our territory.'

There was a pretty undignified dash for the kitchen and the take out menus and Laura settled back in her seat, raising an eyebrow when Derek didn't get up.

'Bun?' She met his eyes and saw uncertainty there. 'What's wrong?'

'Can I talk to you?' he asked, his eyes flicking to the kitchen where the sounds of growling and scuffling could be heard. 'Alone?'

'Sure.' She got up and stretched. 'Porch?'

'Greenhouse.' he replied.

They ended up walking the perimeter of the garden and Laura leaned into him, feeling Derek take her weight. He'd grown tall and strong in the past few years, built like their father had been.

'Spit it out.' She elbowed him. 'What's got you smelling like this?'

'Boyd told me something today,' he replied. 'He said that Stiles has a necklace just like mine.'

'No,' Laura smiled. 'That's not possible. Mom got that made for you for your birthday.'

'I know,' Derek replied. 'But Boyd was pretty adamant. I believe him too, you know how observant he is.'

'So how could that happen?' Laura asked, but something was already prickling at the back of her neck. This conversation was far too similar to the one she'd had with Peter. 'You've never met him before. I've never met him before. He must have found it in the house.'

'But why would he have one just like mine?' Derek asked. 'That doesn't make sense.'

'No, it doesn't,' Laura started running through things that hadn't made sense and got the feeling that they were just seeing the tip of the iceberg.

'That's not all,' Derek said and she turned back to look at him and he gave her a half shrug. 'I've been having dreams.'

'That's not unusual,' she replied and he shook his head, dark hair falling in his eyes from the force of it.

'No,' He huffed, frustrated. 'They're about me when I was little. I was playing with a boy. He was human, and he was a year younger than me. I don't know how I know but I do.'

'Also impossible,' Laura tried to sound reassuring. 'It was pretty much just us.'

'Tell my brain that,' Derek was now going red in the ears. 'And tell my nose that too, because Stiles smells like nobody else I've ever scented.'

'That's the magic,' Laura said. 'Peter explained that.'

'No,' Derek scuffed one boot into the dirt. 'It feels like more.'

Laura was trying to think of what to say in reply when they were interrupted by Peter's car pulling up. She sighed and caught Derek by the back of the neck, squeezing gently.

'We'll talk about this more later,' she told him. 'Let's go eat and talk to Peter. And see if he has any suggestions.'

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Allison looked up when Chris came into her room and sat on the edge of her bed.

'You ready to tell me what that was?' he asked and Allison turned around to lean on the back of her chair.

'Lydia's part of the pack,' she replied. He'd seen them talking together in the parking lot when he'd picked her up. 'She's dating the alpha.'

'No kidding,' Chris looked surprised. 'Isn't she a little young?'

'You wouldn't say that if you knew what she was like,' Allison replied with a wry smile. 'She's probably the scariest person I've met so far. Not that I knew that this morning. It would have been nice to have a heads up. I thought I was being discreet.'

'Sometimes discretion is overrated,' Chris said. 'At least we've laid our cards on the table. Or at least most of them.'

‘Do you think Laura bought the story about Ennis?’ Allison asked. She shifted uneasily. ‘What if they find out the truth?’

‘Then we deal with it.’ Chris told her. ‘Right now, we’re going to try and contain her without anyone finding out who she is. I’ve asked the pack for help, but ideally I’d like to keep them as far away from this as possible.’

‘Yeah.’ Allison’s mouth quirked. ‘Good luck with that. Something tells me this pack doesn’t like being kept out of the loop.’

‘What are the others like?’ Chris asked and she shrugged.

‘Stronger than I thought.’ she said honestly. ‘And they’re really tight-knit. Derek’s kind of in charge at school, probably because he’s the oldest born wolf.’ She frowned. ‘Weird thing though, I met another new student today and Derek said he’s part of the pack already. I have no idea how that happened.’

‘Who is it?’ Chris was clearly as curious as she was.

‘His name is Stiles Stilinski.’ Allison tapped her pen in the back of her chair. ‘He’s the new Sheriff’s son, right?’

‘He is, but this Sheriff is not in the loop.’ Chris looked thoughtful. ‘Laura Hale being a deputy means she’s able to take on anything that might be suspicious.’

‘Probably not a bad idea being able to work with her directly then.’ Allison said. ‘From what you’ve told me, Haigh was corrupt and incompetent.’

‘And mixed in with a very bad crowd.’ Chris added. ‘He’s the one who investigated the Hale fire and came out with arson. Like a pack of werewolves wouldn’t have been able to sniff out faulty wiring.’

They looked at each other and Allison felt sick to her stomach. She knew there were hunters that didn’t abide by the Code all too well.

‘What if we find out who did it?’ she asked. ‘While we’re here.’

‘The we do the right thing and hand them over for punishment.’ Chris’s eyes were icy. ‘Regardless of who it is.’

‘Okay.’ Allison rested her chin on her hand and watched him carefully. ‘Well, you’ve spoken to Laura Hale and I’ve spoken to the junior wolf scouts. What about Peter Hale?’

‘You leave him to me.’ her father said and got up, but not before Allison caught that little flicker of guilt in his eyes. She’d seen it before and it was driving her mad with curiosity.

Whatever her father’s history with Peter Hale was, she’d bet every quarrel she had that it wasn’t what he was pretending it was.

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Stiles pulled up outside the house, still a little floaty from Peter’s treatment. He got out, noting that Scott’s bike wasn’t outside, and went into the house. To his surprise, he found his father in the kitchen and Melissa nowhere in sight. He swallowed hard to quell his nerves and hovered in the doorway, remembering what Melissa had said about communication.

'Hi.' he said and Noah turned around to reveal a pot on the stove in front of him. That made Stiles goggle. 'What are you doing?'

'Cooking.' Noah replied. 'I thought I'd make bigos.'

Stiles was shocked to say the least. Bigos had one of the things his mother had made for them, thick and hearty and delicious and sadly lacking since she'd died.

'Why?' he asked, coming forward to put his backpack on the table. He saw the way Noah's eyes followed his movements, the sudden realisation in his eyes when he saw the bandages on Stiles hands.

'Jesus.' His shoulders slumped. 'Christ, I am so sorry, kiddo. I can't say sorry enough.'

That blew Stiles away almost as much as the stew. They'd always worked under a system of not acknowledging when they'd hurt each other, the assumption of apology being used in place of actual words so it was astonishing to hear his father say it aloud.

'It's okay...' he started and Noah shook his head violently.

'It's not okay.' he said sternly. 'Don't make excuses for my behaviour. I was wrong to do it and you have every right to be angry with me. I should never have hurt you like that.'

Stiles stared at him, barely able to breathe. He'd always wished for this, but now it was right in front of him, he didn't know what to do with it.

'Is that why...' He looked at the pot and Noah sighed heavily.

'You're right.' he finally said. 'You've always been so damn smart, much smarter than I ever knew how to deal with. It hurts to talk about her and so I just shut it away because that way I don't have to acknowledge it. I'm sorry. I never meant to make it seem like I forgot about her, or that I didn't love her or you.'

'You do though.' Stiles mumbled. 'And I know I haven't helped. I've been pretty shitty sometimes and I've caused a lot of trouble. I don't want you to think I'm not grateful for you trying to help me, it's just that sometimes I feel like you'd rather Scott was your son and not me.'

He watched how Noah's eyes widened in shock and then he gasped, his whole body being crushed by the force of his father's hug.

'Never ever say that.' Noah muttered in his ear. 'You are my son. I love you more than anyone in the world and I'm sorry I never say it, but you have to believe me. I would do anything in the world to take away the pain you feel and it kills me when I don't know how to do that.'

Stiles felt himself almost collapse as all the pain inside him rushed to the fore, taking the breath right out of him. He tried to inhale but it turned into a choked off noise as he started crying so hard his whole body shook with grief that he'd kept bottled up for so long. It took him a few minutes to realise that Noah was shaking as well and that his shirt was wet at the shoulder where his father was also crying like a child.

'I'm sorry.' Stiles sobbed, grabbing handfuls of Noah's sweatshirt. 'I don't mean it.'

'No, I'm sorry.' Noah pulled back, his face tear streaked and his eyes red rimmed as he took Stiles' face in his hands. 'I promise I will never ever do that again. I would do anything to take it back.' His face was wide open, every emotion Stiles had wanted to see right there for him. He nodded and

held onto Noah's wrists.

'Can we try again?' he asked. 'I know I've said that so many times and then let you down, but I mean it.'

'Yeah.' Noah smiled and leaned in to knock their foreheads together urgently. 'Can you give me a second chance?'

'Yes.' Stiles smiled through his tears and then laughed. 'I think your cabbage might be catching though.'

'Shit.' Noah glanced over his shoulder and then pulled Stiles back in, letting him sink into him. It was like when he was younger and he held on shamelessly and let himself be cuddled. 'Fuck the cabbage.'

'Mom would kick your ass for saying that.' he said into Noah's shoulder.

'Probably.' Noah was smiling into his hair, Stiles could feel it from the shape of his mouth.

'You're so much like her and I'm so thankful for that. Don't ever think that I hate it.'

'Okay.' Stiles replied and wrapped both arms around him. 'So long as you don't either.'

They were still standing there when the cabbage started to smoke and they finally had to rescue it. Stiles opened the windows while Noah took the smouldering pot outside. When he came back in he looked surprised.

'You cleaned out the greenhouse.' he said and Stiles nodded.

'Guess I'm not so useless after all.' he replied and Noah's mouth turned down.

'I've been really shit at being your father lately.' he said. 'That changes today.'

'Not that I'm not grateful.' Stiles said as they started setting out a new batch of vegetables. 'But that made you change your mind.'

'Laura Hale.' Noah nodded at his wrists. 'She told me you hurt yourself and that her brother patched you up and I realised that I had my head so far up my ass that I hadn't even noticed.'

'They're okay now.' Stiles shrugged. 'I grazed them falling over while I was running.' He chanced a small smile. 'They're nice, the Hales. I like them.'

'Derek's a year ahead of you, isn't he?' Noah asked and he nodded. 'It's good to make new friends.'

'Not just him though.' Stiles grinned. 'There're more.'

'No kidding.' Noah's eyebrows went up. 'That's probably the best news I've had all day.'

'Yeah.' For the first time in what felt like forever, Stiles felt at ease and happy to be there talking to him. 'They're kind of weird, but I like them.'

'I'm glad.' Noah handed him a peeler. 'Tell me about them.'

-

Peter was quiet the whole way through dinner. Once the others that had homes to go to went home,

apart from Isaac who was staying over, he sat listening with half an ear to the rest of his pack chattering around him, all of them talking a mile a minute except for Derek. His nephew thought he was being subtle but the quiet sniffs he kept taking every time he walked past Peter gave him away. He took a sip of wine and let himself get lost in thought.

'She shouldn't have.' Claudia was smiling. *She slid the delicate silver chain between her fingers and then glanced over to the two boys chasing each other around the giant oak. They'd grown, now both in that gangling stage of pre-adolescence that saw them nearly falling over their own feet more often than not.*

'It's tradition.' Peter was leaning back on his hands, watching the boys. *The dappled sunlight caught spiky black and tousled brown hair as the chase escalated, ending in giggles and play fighting, Derek's own necklace in his shirt pocket for safekeeping.*

'I wish we could be here more.' Claudia sighed, sitting back alongside him. *'I miss this.'*

'So do I.' he told her and she leaned in and put her head on his shoulder.

'Do you think they'll be best friends forever like us?' she asked and he chuffed at her.

'I don't know.' he replied, breathing in the scent of magic that surrounded her, woven in with the smell of pack. *'But I hope so.'*

The recollection hit him like a punch in the gut and Peter shot to his feet, eyes blazing. The rest of the pack reacted instantly, all of them falling silent and staring at him.

'Peter.' Laura's eyes were red. 'What's wrong?'

'Derek.' He looked to see the young wolf gaping at him. 'Go get your pack token.'

'What?' Derek looked confused. 'How did you know about that?'

'Just do it.' Peter barked and Derek moved quicker than sight, his footsteps thumping up the stairs.

'What the hell...?' Laura came over to him. 'Derek's right, how did you know about Stiles having one?'

'He was wearing it at the shop.' Peter replied. His hands were shaking as he started pacing.

'I've been trying to figure it out.' He stopped and narrowed his eyes at her. 'How did you know?'

'Boyd.' Laura said, also looking confused. 'He saw it at school and told Derek at practice.' She met Peter's eyes. 'We were going to ask you about it. It doesn't make sense that he'd have a pack token if he's never even been here or met the pack.'

'Unless he has.' Peter replied just as Derek came bolting back into the room. He held out a hand and Peter took the necklace from him. He ran the chain through his fingers just like he had seen Claudia doing in his head and then handed it back.

'Identical.' he said and Derek looked completely lost.

'I don't understand.' he said and Laura growled.

'She wouldn't have.' Her eyes were brilliant crimson.

'Never underestimate what your mother would or wouldn't have done to protect her pack.' Peter

snarled. 'I just had a memory hit me out of nowhere that couldn't have possibly happened.'

'Fuck.' Cora was watching them all with bright eyes. 'Okay, this is getting creepy.'

'I've been having dreams.' Derek blurted out. 'About me playing with another boy around the Nemeton.'

'Holy shit.' Laura smacked her own forehead. 'Fuck me. This is huge. I hadn't even considered that she had done that.'

'So what are you saying?' Derek sounded frantic. 'It's real?'

'I think so.' Peter sat back down, his face pale. 'The question is if Talia took our memories, why did she do it? What could have been happening that she'd need to resort to that.'

'I don't understand.' Isaac said. 'How could she take your memories?'

'It's something an alpha can do.' Cora was looking just as pale, her hand going to the back of her neck. 'She could implant memories too.' her face was stricken when she looked at them. 'I don't remember Stiles at all.'

'She didn't call him Stiles.' Peter let his head thump against the back of the chair, his heart pounding. 'She called him...'

'Mischief.' Derek finished. He had the necklace in his fist, knuckles white from how tightly he was holding it. 'That's what we all called him.'

'Fuck.' Laura slumped on the couch next to Cora and Isaac. 'Well, it would explain why you feel a connection to him.'

Peter gave Derek a look, grinning when his ears went red.

'A connection?' he asked and Derek scowled at him.

'He smells good.' he muttered. 'That's all.'

'No it's not.' Isaac piped up, looking smug. 'Tell them about what you did.'

'No.' Derek turned his glare on him. 'And shut up.'

'Wait.' Laura was on that in a second. 'What happened?'

'Theo was harassing Stiles in the bathroom.' Isaac said. 'Derek saved his ass. Literally.'

'Jesus.' Laura matched Derek's angry eyebrows with her own. 'You got into a fight.'

'Wasn't much of a fight.' There was a glimpse of fang in Derek's grin. 'Theo's a douche bag. He deserves everything he gets.'

'That I am well aware of.' Laura sat back and regarded her brother. 'How did you know?'

'I just did.' Derek frowned. 'Or I must have heard them.'

'Or maybe it's something else.' Peter mused, thinking about the necklace. 'Whatever it is, we need to get to the bottom of it.'

'Deaton?' Laura asked, a look of distaste on her face.

'Deaton.' he confirmed, not feeling any better about the situation.

-

Stiles was smiling. He was fed and relaxed and him and Noah were chilling on the couch when the front door cracked and Scott came in, looking like he wanted to punch something.

'You asshole.' he seethed, standing glaring at Stiles. 'What the hell did you and your freak friends do?'

Completely taken aback, Stiles could only stare at him. Thankfully, he didn't need to defend himself because Noah was on his feet and giving Scott a furious look.

'I suggest you back down, son.' he said and Stiles made a face because it was his cop voice. He recognised it well enough, but Scott hadn't ever been on the receiving end and the shock on his face was pretty priceless.

'Stiles' new asshole boyfriend punched my friend in the face!' he yelled, waving his hands.

'Excuse me?' Noah moved to stand between them. 'Would this be Theo Raeken by any chance?'

'Yeah.' Scott backed down and then stood there looking mutinous. 'So what?'

'So I've heard some not very good reports about him and his little band of miscreants.' Noah replied, grey eyes stern. 'Like how they have a reputation for being bullies for one.' He turned back to Stiles. 'What happened?'

Before Stiles would have denied everything but this time he breathed in deeply and sat up straight.

'I'm sorry, Scott.' he said. 'But Theo tried to...well let's just say that he gave it a shot, I said no and then he and Donovan decided that my consent wasn't needed.'

'What?!' Noah exploded. He was incandescently angry.

'You must have done something!' Scott shouted. 'You always do! And even if he was being what you say he was, Derek had no right to go in there and break Donovan's nose or throw Theo against the wall!'

'Actually, I broke Donovan's nose.' Stiles couldn't help being a little smug. 'When someone tries to stick their hands down my pants uninvited and calls me a slut, I have every right to defend myself!'

The look on Scott's face told him that maybe that part hadn't been part of Theo's tattle telling. Unfortunately he didn't get a chance to rebut because Noah was pulling his cell out of his pocket.

'Enough!' He waved a hand at Scott when he started to protest. 'I'm going to call Laura and get Derek's side of the story and so help me Scott, you better stop hanging out with those kids! They're nothing but bad news!'

'What?' Scott did a flail that Stiles would have been proud of. 'What about Stiles and those psychos he's hanging out with?'

'The Hale kids are not the issue.' Noah gritted out. 'From what I can tell, Laura's managed to bring up her siblings to be damn good kids. Stiles says the others are as well.'

'Stiles says!' Scott huffed, folding his arms and sulking. 'You should hear the rumours about them.'

'I don't need to.' Noah replied, phone to his ear. 'I trust my deputy's judgement over that of a bunch of little hellions that think it's funny to film a teenage girl having a seizure and put it on the internet or who think that trying to terrify an abused kid by throwing him in an open grave and leaving him there is somehow entertaining. I could go on, but quite frankly some of the things they were allowed to get away with appall me.'

Stiles sat there, barely able to conceal his delight at being defended so vehemently. He hadn't expected Noah to listen with as much interest as he talked about the pack, but he had and it was clear now that Stiles wasn't the only person he'd been listening to. He took childish pleasure in sticking his tongue out at Scott when Laura answered the phone and Noah went into the kitchen to talk to her.

'Ugh.' Scott threw up both of his hands and flung himself into the closest chair. 'You suck!'

'Hey, I'm not the dick that didn't stand up for his brother when those asswipes called me a freak.' he retorted and Scott had the decency to look a little bit sheepish.

'I know.' he finally grumbled, then eyed Stiles reluctantly. 'Did they really do that to you?'

'Yeah.' Stiles huffed. 'Derek really did save my ass, I wasn't lying about that.'

Scott glowered at him some more, at least until Noah came back in with an even more enraged look on his face.

'I'm going to be having a very serious talk with your principal tomorrow.' he said, sitting back down next to Stiles.

'See?' Stiles threw Scott a smug look. 'Theo and co. are bad news.'

'I have to agree.' Noah said. 'Scott, you need to find some better friends.'

'But I just got these ones.' Scott pouted and then rolled his eyes when they both glared at him. 'Fine.'

'Good.' Noah sat back and held up the remote. 'Baseball?'

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'So what do you think?' Tracy asked and then kicked out at Theo when he didn't answer. 'Hey asshole. I'm talking to you.'

'Shut up, Trace.' Theo was still seething from what had happened earlier. He hated not getting his own way and the fact that Stiles Stilinski had somehow managed to not only get the better of them and also attract the attention of the hottest senior in school was severely pissing him off. 'I have a better idea.'

They were all at his house, deciding just how they were going to get back at the Hales and their uppity friends for what had happened. Tracy's plan to TP their house was nowhere near enough but Theo's brain was very seldom still and he'd just had the best idea.

'We do the brother.' he said. 'Scott.'

‘Why?’ Matt sat up, looking confused. ‘I thought we thought he was cool.’

‘We did.’ Theo replied, his smile sharp and bordering on cruel. ‘But he’s also the perfect way to send a message.’

‘What are we doing?’ Donovan asked. His face had started to purple and there was tape over his broken nose.

‘We’re going to initiate him.’ Theo told them. ‘I’m thinking a good old fashioned hazing.’

The other three all looked at each other and sat up, their eyes bright with excitement.

‘We could put him in a locker.’ Matt suggested. ‘Or steal his phone and put his porn history online.’

‘We could wreck his bike or beat the shit out of him.’ Donovan was actually rubbing his hands together. He looked like a giant fly when he did that and Theo bared his teeth at him.

‘No.’ he said. ‘We’re going to scare him shitless is what we’re going to do. That asmathic little freak will be having nightmares for months after we’re done with him.’

‘How are we going to do that?’ Tracey asked, looking doubtful and Theo wanted to smack her in her stupid mouth.

‘We’re going hunting.’ he declared. ‘In the preserve.’

Chapter 8

Stiles got upstairs later than he'd hoped to, but his new truce with Noah had had him lingering in the living room. Scott had gone upstairs, sulking about what had been said and that had left the two of them to watch TV and it had felt a lot like before. Finally Noah's eyelids had started to droop and he'd given Stiles one last hug and gone to bed. Stiles had made the trek up the final flight of stairs and now he was in his room. He got undressed and crawled onto his bed, taking his backpack with him.

Peter had said to read the journal but hadn't offered a way to open it and Stiles was reluctant to try and pry it open. He took it from the back pocket and studied it. The leather was butter soft under his fingers and when he got to the brass lock it felt like it was buzzing. Curious, Stiles poked at it and then gasped when there was a little click, the lock falling open.

Stiles sat and stared at it. He finally poked at it again, then picked the journal up and inspected it, his eyes wide.

She was a witch.

Peter's words bounced around his brain and he cautiously opened the front cover to see spidery handwriting in black ink. The name Aneta Gajos was inscribed on the first page and the triskelion that was everywhere had been drawn underneath.

Stiles breathing caught, his heart starting to thump in excitement. He turned to the next page and then realised that everything had been written in Polish. He bounced a little and then threw himself off the bed and charged downstairs. He found Noah in his sleep pants and an old LAPD t-shirt reading a James Patterson novel in bed. He peered at Stiles over the top of his reading glasses.

'What lit your ass on fire?' he asked and Stiles grinned.

'Where's the Polish dictionary?' he asked. He was capable but not fluent and didn't want to accidentally misunderstand something.

'There's a box in the den that we haven't opened yet.' Noah replied. 'It should be in there. Why?'

'Peter gave me Babcia's journal.' Stiles replied. 'I want to read it but it's in Polish.'

'Why on earth did he have your grandmother's journal?' Noah asked and then shook his head.

'Never mind. I've started to realise this place is a little odd.'

'Thanks.' Stiles turned to go and then leaned back in. 'By the way, did Mom ever say anything about her family being interested in magic?'

'What the...' Noah's brows knitted together. 'What are you talking about, Stiles? Like rabbits out of hats? I don't think that's a good idea. Remember when you went through that stage and tried to do the magic milk act and ended up saturating Mrs Stephens from next door.'

'Never mind then.' Stiles waved a hand. 'I'll see you in the morning.'

He shut the door and galloped downstairs. Noah was right, the dictionary was exactly where he said it would be. Stiles clutched it to his chest and hurtled back upstairs. He did hesitate on the landing, listening at Scott's door. He was talking to someone, his voice too low for Stiles to really hear, but he was distracted and didn't hang around.

Once he was back in his room, he carefully closed the door and then flung himself back on the bed.

‘Okay you.’ he said to the journal. ‘Time to reveal your secrets.’

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Laura drained her wine and waved the empty glass at Peter.

‘Why did you do that?’ she demanded and he growled at her.

‘It opened the damn cabinet by itself and practically threw itself at him.’ he explained. ‘I’m pretty sure if I had tried to stop it, it would have hit me in the back of the head until I relented.’

Derek looked at Cora and Isaac, who both looked back at him with the same *what the fuck* expression that he knew he had. The evening was turning out to be very enlightening.

‘Then you should have explained that giving it to an untrained Spark would result in a whole lot of shenanigans.’ Laura retorted. ‘Jesus, Peter. What if he uses it?’

‘Hang on.’ Derek raised a hand and they both glared at him. ‘So what? Aneta had a magic book?’

‘It’s a grimoire actually. Which you would know if you ever paid attention to what I tell you.’ Peter replied. ‘It’s got all her own magical recipes and spells and whatnot in there. Claudia had one too but obviously we have no idea what happened to it. This one seemed particularly invested in getting into Stiles’ hands and technically it does belong to him, so he got it.’ He gave Laura a look. ‘And I told him to come to the shop tomorrow if he had questions.’

‘So you decided him finding out by himself was a good idea.’ Laura’s sarcasm could have cut glass.

‘I said she was a witch.’ Peter held up his hands. ‘It’s not my fault he thinks we’re all pagans.’

‘Oh yeah.’ Isaac snorted. ‘Derek said he thought that. It’s pretty funny.’

‘And not so far from the truth.’ Cora added. ‘So what do we do now?’

‘We let him come to us.’ Peter replied. ‘I’m sure he’s reading it as we speak. Tomorrow I’ll start explaining things.’

‘Fine.’ Laura muttered. ‘I’ll handle Deaton.’

‘You really think he was involved?’ Derek asked, inching closer to Cora. He didn’t like their former emissary much. Deaton was cryptic to the point of madness and he knew that Laura felt the same. He had been little help in the wake of the fire and finally Peter had gotten pissed off enough that the entire pack had broken with him.

‘This has his fingerprints all over it.’ Peter growled. ‘Talía told me everything. The only reason she would have kept this from me would be because she knew I’d never willingly let her exile Claudia and erase her from the pack’s memory. The fact that none of us remember Stiles, means she had to have done it to all of us.’

‘That would have been easy with me, Derek and Cora.’ Laura said. ‘But you? I don’t get how she got it past you.’

‘Neither do I.’ Peter scowled. ‘I’m not happy about that fact at all.’

‘So say that the dreams are really memories.’ Derek said. ‘Does that mean Stiles and I were friends?’

‘Obviously.’ Laura replied. ‘It also means that Claudia visited Beacon Hills and pretty regularly. She was in contact with us until Stiles was at least ten if she gave him a pack token.’

‘Claudia died two years after that.’ Peter steepled his fingers. ‘Do you remember Talia going anywhere that year?’

‘No.’ Laura replied. ‘Which is weird. She travelled to councils with other packs all the time.’

‘So what if, maybe, Claudia asked her to do it when she was dying.’ Peter offered. ‘If Noah didn’t know anything about us, and we presume he didn’t, then maybe she thought it would be better for Stiles to forget about us rather than be separated from us.’

‘That does give her motivation but I still don’t like it.’ Laura replied. ‘Derek, how many dreams have you had?’

‘A couple.’ Derek rubbed at the back of his neck. He was feeling all kinds of conflicting emotions. ‘I think we’re around that age in them. Maybe a little younger.’

‘Why are the dreams happening now though?’ Cora asked.

‘Because Stiles has come home.’ Peter explained. ‘His magic has probably gotten a huge boost from just being in the same town as the Nemeton. I wouldn’t be surprised if it’s leaking out all over the place. He absolutely reeks of it. Not to mention that he’s living in Aneta’s house and that place is practically sentient.’

‘Really?’ Derek had never been in Aneta’s house to his knowledge but he’d always felt a pull to it. It was one of the reasons he always seemed to find himself standing at the back fence when he was doing his perimeter runs. Now it was starting to make sense.

‘It plays tricks.’ Peter smiled. ‘Claudia could get it to do anything she wanted. I imagine that Stiles is probably going to be the same, even if he has no idea what he’s doing at first.’

‘He needs to get it under control, if that’s the case.’ Laura said. ‘Do we know anyone that can help besides you?’

‘I can do my best for now.’ Peter replied. ‘We can start tomorrow. But you’re right, Stiles is going to need someone who’s got more experience with this kind of magic than me.’

‘I’ll ask Satomi.’ Laura said. ‘I know that she knows a family that has kitsunes in them. They are more adept at working with magic. I can also ask Marin.’

‘That’ll step on Deaton’s toes.’ Peter grinned. ‘You know how he feels about her.’

Derek knew that the Hale’s former emissary and his sister had a strained relationship. He personally found Marin a much easier person to deal with. Deaton’s attempt to assume power in the vacuum after the fire wasn’t all there was though. There were whispers between Laura and Peter that he’d listened in on and the impression wasn’t good, hints about Deaton’s obsession with his mother.

Laura blew out a deep breath and then looked at her watch.

‘It’s too late to call either her or Deucalion now.’ She got up and stretched. ‘Bed, I think. We can

talk about this again in the morning.'

They shuffled upstairs, all of them stopping to say goodnight. Isaac was sleeping in Cora's bed, Laura's hearing and sharp sense of smell enough to keep them in line. Derek threw Isaac a grin as he made his way upstairs to his room, closing the door and shedding his clothes until he was standing in front of the window in his boxers. He leaned out, breathing in the night air and the scents in the preserve.

On a whim, he inhaled deeply and then howled into the darkness. It wasn't loud, not a territory howl, but it would travel and he hoped that Stiles would hear it. He now wanted to know just how much Stiles might remember, if what they all thought was true. The jump from magic to werewolves being a thing wouldn't too great and Derek suddenly and desperately wanted to be able to tell Stiles what he was and be accepted for it. He'd never been able to with Paige, even though he'd trusted her with his life.

He lay on the covers and thought through the conversation, his brain trying to lay out what Laura and Peter had said. That was when he heard the answering howl. It was faint and squeaky and completely and utterly human and Derek grinned like crazy and sat up.

'No like this.' He took the little hands offered to him and shaped them so Mischief could make the same sound. It was reedy and high pitched but a pretty decent approximation of what he and Cora were able to do. Laura was a teenager and so too cool to play howl with them anymore.

Mischief's little face scrunched up. He held his hands to his mouth and howled and Derek grinned and ruffled his hair.

'That's it.' he said, beaming at Mischief's delighted smile. *'Now you're a proper wolf.'*

And just like that Derek remembered Stiles when he'd been Mischief. His amber brown eyes and little moles that danced across his skin like constellations in reverse and his shocky scent that sometimes made Derek sneeze when they were playing around the Nemeton. It was like someone was wiping the surface of his memory clean, all the fuzzy details coming into sharp relief.

-

Stiles felt silly, dropping his cupped hands and then retreating to his bed. He didn't know why he'd answered the howl but it had been too strong an urge to just ignore.

He draped himself over his pillows and picked up the journal again. It was slow going but what he'd read so far had his heart pounding and his imagination working overtime. Peter hadn't been kidding when he'd called Aneta a witch. The journal was more like a spell book, with directions and ingredients and bits of lore that Stiles found fascinating.

He heard the house creaking around him and it almost sounded pleased. Stiles grinned and went back to the passage he was reading, chosen because there was a drawing of the phases of the moon that matched his necklace perfectly. It was about how magic ebbed and flowed and could be tapped into by knowing the way nature worked and the lines that crossed beneath the land. The next page had what looked like a basic map of beacon Hills, lines travelling through it drawn in red ink. They wove through the town itself then wove back around the hills and concentrated in a common point on the preserve. There was a word written above it in fancy script.

Nemeton.

Stiles frowned and opened Wikipedia. This was starting to get very interesting. He speed read

through the article, his heart skipping a beat when he came across the words sacred grove.

‘Fuck.’ He tapped his fingers against the page. ‘Babcia, what the hell were you up to? I just hope like hell you weren’t dancing naked in the woods.’ He looked around him as the house creaked loudly, almost like it was laughing at him.

His phone buzzed and Stiles picked it up, squinting at the message.

School tomorrow, kiddo. Go to sleep.

He snickered and set the journal aside. Peter’s suggestion that he come by the shop if he had questions was a good one, but Stiles also had plans to corner a certain broody person first. Somehow, he had the feeling that Derek would be more forthcoming.

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Laura heard someone moving outside her door and sighed.

‘You can come in, you know.’ she said and the door cracked open. Derek was a darker shadow against the black, moving soundlessly after letting her know he was there. He crawled into bed with her, moving to curl up like he had when he was a cub.

‘I remembered him.’ he whispered. ‘He was here with all of us. I was teaching him to howl.’

‘Do you remember what Mom used to say about some people just meant to have their fates entwined?’ she asked and his eyes glowed gold briefly before he settled in next to her.

‘It’s weird but when I first saw him, I didn’t realise how much like Paige he looks.’ He made a face, clear even in the dark to Laura. ‘But now I’m starting to think I liked Paige because she looked like him.’

‘You two only became friends when you went to middle school.’ Laura turned on her back, looking at the ceiling as she thought. ‘You must have imprinted when you met her. Your instincts told you that this was someone who looked like the person you were connected to.’

‘You’re going to say it, aren’t you?’ Derek grumbled.

‘It’s a possibility.’ Laura replied. ‘You know it is. You’ve said yourself that he smells preternaturally good to you. You knew something was going on with him in the bathroom. He has a wolf token that is exactly the same as yours. Peter’s having memories about him too and you know he and Claudia were close. I wasn’t as involved obviously, which is why you two are the ones getting their memories back. I still had a lot to learn about it, but Mom did tell me that if the connection is strong enough it can override the removal. And Stiles is a Spark. I think that Peter’s right, the Nemeton and being in the house are waking his magic up.’

‘I howled to him tonight.’ Derek told her, his voice soft. ‘I think he answered.’

‘Talk to him tomorrow.’ Laura said. ‘I am just asking you to not say anything about us just yet. I need to think how we’re going to do this. We have to be careful that we don’t freak him out.’ She considered and then looked at him. ‘How about you invite him over this weekend. Peter can have the week to talk to him about his grandmother and the magic side of things and once he’s okay with that, we’ll show him what we are.’

‘Okay.’ Derek wriggled closer and she let him insinuate himself under her arm. ‘The whole pack?’

'The whole pack.' Laura replied. 'If this alpha thing is serious, we'll need allies.' She pulled him closer and closed her eyes. 'Now go to sleep, Bun.'

Derek didn't reply but his breathing did steady and she heard his heartbeat slow. That was enough to settle her and she soon followed.

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'Mischief!' His mother's eyes caught the sun, flaring the same amber gold as his own and Stiles squeaked in delight and ran, peering back around the huge tree trunk as he watched her playfully stalk him.

'Catch me, Mama.' he giggled and ran. He stopped and waited but when she didn't follow he frowned and went back around.

The glade was empty.

'Mama?' He crept out from the shadow of the tree, his lip quivering. 'Where are you?'

'She's not here, maty.' The unfamiliar voice was warm but also stern. There was a movement just on the edge of his vision and then a woman came out into the remaining sunlight. Her hair was silver grey and tied in a knot at the back of her neck. Her jeans were worn and the white cotton shirt she wore was thin and gauzy, showing a figure unbowed by age. As she got closer, Stiles saw himself in her brown eyes and the cluster of three moles at the left corner of her mouth. There was a long silver chain around her neck, then pendant on it a circle flanked by two crescents, all set with what looked like moonstones.

'Babcia.' His voice came out older. He glanced down at his hand and he wasn't a child anymore.

'You've grown, Mieszko.' Aneta cupped his face, her hand so warm.

'I'm in high school, now.' Stiles replied, his hands shaking as he clenched them into fists.

'Maybe so, but you're long overdue your proper education.' Aneta said sternly. 'Claudia was remiss. I can't blame her too much though. She and I had parted ways long before you were born. I never got to meet you properly. Even though she brought you here many times, it was never to see me and I had to rely on stolen glances and what Peter told me about you.'

'Why?' Stiles felt terribly bereft.

'Your father was not who I would have chosen for her.' Aneta replied. 'He was older and not one of us, not the same way as we are. My mother and father still followed the old ways but your father's people had long since abandoned them. I was foolish and underestimated her feelings for Noah and so I made her choose. She chose him and turned her back on me and her magic.'

'What about when I was born though.' Stiles could feel tears pricking behind his eyelids. 'Why couldn't you both have fixed things then?'

'Because I was too proud to admit that I had been hasty and she was happy. With your father and you.' Aneta replied. 'It is the greatest regret of my life along with never having had the chance to teach you about your gifts.'

'My gifts?' Stiles asked and she nodded.

'You're very special, maty.' Her eyes were sad. 'And it hurts me to see you in such pain. If I had

been able to, I would have helped you. Now all I can do is show you the way.'

'I don't understand.' Stiles felt tears running down his face.

'The things you have felt. The headaches, the sickness.' Aneta sighed. *'It all comes from you not having been allowed to be who you are.'* She smiled at him. *'But now you finally come back to where you have always been meant to be.'* She looked up at the tree and Stiles followed her gaze to see how it seemed to almost bow over them. *'With the people you were meant to be with.'*

Stiles shivered as howls filled the air, the sky behind the tree turning dark. The moon rose, brilliant and full and Aneta laughed.

Trust them' she said, and now she was far away and fading into the darkness. *'And trust yourself, Mieszko. You know the path to follow, you've just forgotten how to find it but now he will lead you back.'*

Stiles wheeled around at a noise behind him, staring at the huge black wolf standing a few feet from him. It whined once, eyes flashing a warm gold and Stiles knew he should be terrified, but all he felt was an overwhelming sense of safety and trust and he fell to his knees, one hand outstretched.

The wolf sniffed at his fingers and then sidled closer, close enough that Stiles could feel the puff of warm breath on his face as he sank his fingers into the thick fur at his ruff.

'Hi.' he murmured and the wolf whined again and nosed at him. *'I'm guessing you're my guide.'*

The wolf chuffed and licked the tears from his face and Stiles threw both arms around it and held on tightly, the scent of warm fur and forest in his nose.

Stiles woke with a start, the remnants of the dream lingering as he stared at the sun coming through the attic window.

'Holy shit.' he breathed, putting one hand over his heart and feeling it beat so hard it felt like it was about to jump right out of his chest. It didn't help that his alarm went off second later, making him flail almost right out of bed.

He bounded down the stairs to shower and hurtling back up with his towel half hanging off his ass, nearly mowing down Noah as he went.

'Jesus, slow down.' Noah grinned at him. 'What's the rush?'

'I thought I'd get a head start.' Stiles replied, still dripping on the floor. 'Also, I'm going to pick up the Hales.'

'Oh?' Noah looked pleased but confused. 'Laura said they take the bus.'

'And nobody wants to be condemned to that.' Stiles grinned. 'Besides, it's not like they're far away.'

'True.' Noah gave him a jaunty salute. 'As you were.'

Getting dressed took no time at all and resulted in some truly eye watering colour combinations but Stiles didn't really give a shit. Derek seemed to like him regardless. He was busy ploughing his way through a giant bowl of cereal when Scott came into the kitchen, still looking sulky.

'Hi.' Stiles put down his spoon. 'Can we talk about what happened yesterday?'

'No.' Scott, glowered at him. 'You got your way so there's nothing left to talk about.'

'Dude.' Stiles sat back and tried to reason with him. 'Come on, they're assholes. You can do better than that. Why don't you come hang with us today. I promise they're cool. Allison even sat with us yesterday.'

He could see Scott start to waver when he mentioned Allison and did an internal fist pump when he got a reluctant nod.

'Great.' He beamed at him. 'I promise you're going to like them.'

'Whatever.' Scott muttered but he wasn't half as surly as he'd been when he walked in so Stiles chalked it up to a win.

He texted Derek while he was finishing his breakfast.

Want a ride?

The answer came back almost instantly.

Sure. Meet you at the same place?

Stiles replied in the affirmative and got up, draining his sugary milk and rinsing the bowl and spoon before dumping them in the dishwasher. Noah came in as he was closing it and smiled at them. Scott took that as his cue and left without saying goodbye.

'I'm working a double today, but Melissa will be back for dinner.' Noah glanced at his retreating step-son but didn't say anything. 'Stiles, would you mind picking some things up from the store on your way home?'

'Sure.' Stiles replied. 'I'm going to the bookshop so I'll do it after, if that's okay?'

'Yeah.' Noah gave him a quizzical look. 'I thought you worked yesterday.'

'I did.' Stiles hesitated only a second before deciding to go with the truth. 'But here's the thing. Peter told me to come over if I had questions about the journal, so...'

'Oh.' Noah's expression cleared. 'I see. Did you find something interesting in there?'

'A lot actually.' Stiles decided to do a little probing. 'Did you ever meet her?'

'Just the once.' Noah said. 'Let's just say that it didn't go well. She really didn't like me.'

'Oh.' Stiles felt a cold shiver go down his spine. The dream had been right on that much. 'So I never got to meet her? Even when I was a baby.'

'No.' Noah sighed. 'And I have to say, it isn't something I'm proud of. But your mom was pretty adamant.' He came over and put a hand on the back of Stiles' neck, pulling him forward to kiss him on the forehead. It made Stiles feel happy and loved and he realised just how far the distance between them had gotten now that it wasn't there anymore.

'Be careful.' he said as Noah started for the door. 'You know how dangerous these little picture perfect towns can be.'

'Yeah.' Noah chuckled. 'Meth dealers everywhere. See you later, kiddo.'

'Later.' Stiles waited until he was out the front door before going back upstairs to grab his things. He tucked the journal into his backpack, picked up his necklace from the nightstand and put it on and felt the odd prickle like he was being watched again.

'If that's you, Babcia, message received.' he said to the room and the house creaked in reply. It made Stiles grin and he trotted back downstairs, whistling to himself.

Scott was waiting for him at the Jeep. He scowled down the drive and Stiles looked past him to see Derek and Cora walking towards them.

'That was fast.' he remarked and Cora grinned and elbowed her brother.

'Derek wanted to make sure we didn't miss you.' she said, her voice laden with meaning and Derek ducked his head, looking shy. It was so endearing that Stiles found himself positively wriggling with delight.

'Cool.' He went and opened the door, gesturing for her to get in. 'Your chariot, milady.'

Cora laughed, dark eyes sparkling. She gave him a mocking little bow in reply and bounded in. Derek followed, smirking when their eyes met.

'We match today.' he said, voice low and Stiles frowned. Derek's flicked down and Stiles followed them to the circular shape under his t-shirt.

'Oh. I guess Boyd told you, huh.' He looked up. 'I thought you only wore that on special days.'

'Well, maybe I think today's going to be pretty special.' Derek replied and got in, leaving Stiles to wonder what he meant.

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Laura stopped the Camaro and glanced over at Peter. His hands were clenched in his lap.

'Do I need to take a spray bottle in with me?' she quipped and he bared a fang at her.

'I don't trust him.' he snarled. 'I've never trusted him.'

'I know that, Peter.' Laura replied. 'But if you can't keep yourself from biting him in the ass, then I'm leaving you in the car.'

'I'll be fine.' Peter growled and then gave her a look. 'What? I' can control myself.'

'On Fridays between five and five past five.' Laura muttered, getting out the car.

The front door was locked so they went around the back and found Deaton signing for a delivery. He gave them both a questioning look and then held the door for them as the delivery man took off.

'To what do I owe this early morning visit?' he asked once they were inside and Laura stepped in front of Peter, already sensing the tension building.

'We need to talk to you.' she said. 'About Stiles.'

'Who?' Deaton asked but Laura could see the minute flicker of alarm in his eyes.

‘Don’t play dumb with me.’ she growled. ‘Claudia’s son. The Spark.’

‘Well, I wouldn’t know anything about that.’ Deaton folded his arms. ‘I haven’t seen Claudia since before she left Beacon Hills.’

It was so slight as to be almost undetectable, but it was there and it took every ounce of strength Laura had to hold Peter back as he record and threw himself at Deaton.

‘Enough!’ she bellowed, throwing him back. ‘Go sit in the goddamn car!’ She used her alpha voice and Peter snarled at her but obeyed, retreating from the clinic. Laura waited until she heard the car door shut and turned back to see that her mother’s former emissary was backed up against the counter and looking shifty.

‘Laura..’ he started and she cut him off with a snarl of her own.

‘I don’t want your cryptic bullshit.’ She flashed her eyes and was gratified to see him edge back even further. ‘You know why I’m here. I want to know everything about Aneta and Claudia and Stiles and why he’s waking up.’

That got her a shocked expression and she knew she’d hit pay dirt.

‘This wasn’t supposed to happen.’ Deaton finally said. ‘The Stilinskis were never supposed to come back.’

‘You’ve felt it then.’ Laura knew it was true the second she said it. ‘The Nemeton?’

‘It’s responding to him.’ Deaton replied and she could smell his jealousy. It had all but shut down after the fire and the deaths of her pack and nothing Deaton did would bring it back.

‘It’s not the only thing responding.’ she told him. ‘Peter and Derek are both having dreams.’

Deaton had the decency to look ashamed.

‘I had no idea.’ he said. ‘I never anticipated this or what would happen id Claudia’s son came to Beacon Hills.’

‘You were part of it.’ Laura was a little thrown but she pressed on. ‘Weren’t you?’

‘I don’t know what you’re referring to.’ Deaton said and she growled and moved faster than he could, pinning him against the cabinets, her eyes red and her fangs dropped.

‘You lost the ability to bullshit me a long time ago, Alan.’ she snarled. ‘All kinds of things are happening around here. I have hunters in town looking for a rogue alpha, I have a boy who reeks of magic and has zero idea that he possesses it and I have a brother who is feeling a connection to him when one couldn’t possibly exist. Now I want to know, what the fuck did you and my mother do?’

‘I didn’t do anything.’ Deaton turned his face away when she bared her fangs at him. ‘I just made a suggestion. Talia was the one who took their memories. And yours.’ He couldn’t look her in the eye and Laura begrudgingly let him go.

‘I want reasons.’ she snapped. ‘So start talking.’

‘You mother did what she thought was best.’ Deaton sighed, suddenly looking years older.

‘Claudia was dying and Stiles had never been taught anything about his magic. She didn’t want him to know what he was because she was afraid of him being put in danger.’

‘What danger?’ Laura asked, her suspicions growing. ‘What did you tell her?’

‘The truth.’ Deaton replied. ‘Her dementia was starting to make her lose her grip on reality. She was already talking about things she shouldn’t have. She could have revealed everything, including the existence of the pack.’

‘That’s not all of it, is it though.’ Laura could read him well enough to know that while Deaton wasn’t lying, he was still hiding something.

‘I may have had a vested interest.’ Deaton admitted. ‘But it was in everyone’s best interests for the boy to not be informed. He was untrained and barely showing any sign of magical ability and we decided it was for the best.’

This time, his heartbeat did stutter enough to be detected and Laura raised a clawed finger and jabbed it at him.

‘It was Stiles.’ It all suddenly made sense. ‘You didn’t want him coming back in case he took your place.’

‘Nonsense.’ Deaton snapped, finally showing some emotion. ‘You couldn’t be further from the truth.’

‘Ha.’ Laura gave him a razor sharp. ‘Liar, liar pants on fire Dr Deaton.’ She reached out and tapped his chest. ‘This gives you away and I’m not blind to your faults like my mother was. We all knew you and Claudia were in competition for the position as Talia’s emissary.’

‘And Talia chose me.’ Deaton was getting angry. It wove through his scent and betrayed itself in his elevated heartbeat.

‘Only because Claudia went to college and met Noah.’ Laura said. ‘Peter told me that much. It put her out of the running. And when he was sick, you were so fucking worried about her son coming back to usurp you, you had her wipe all of us clean?’ She backed off, feeling sick to her stomach. ‘That’s low, even for a druid. Did you even have her consent? Was Claudia even able to make that decision?’

‘Balance must be kept.’ Deaton stated, but the look on his face told Laura everything she needed to know. ‘A Spark here with this Nemeton would cause all kinds of devastation.’

‘Newsflash, Doc.’ she growled. ‘This town didn’t need a Spark to fuck things up. From now on, you stay the fuck out of this.’

‘You can’t leave him untrained.’ Deaton moved after her. ‘Laura, he’ll be dangerous.’

‘I know.’ Laura glanced back at him. ‘That’s why I’m sending him to your sister. At least she’s not in it for herself.’

‘That’s not fair.’ Deaton stopped at the back door. ‘I loved your mother. I took my responsibilities as emissary seriously.’

‘And look where that got us.’ Laura sneered. ‘Thanks. But we’ll figure this out on our own.’

When she finally got in the car, she was apoplectic.

‘So.’ Peter looked her up and down. ‘Can I eat him yet?’

Laura burst out laughing, trying so hard to ease her anger. She closed her eyes and focused on her

pack bonds, letting them anchor her until she could pull everything back.

‘They did it.’ she said. ‘Deaton convinced Mom to wipe us all. He’s putting it under “for the good of the town and the pack” but it’s very convenient that it also meant he had nobody in competition with him anymore.’

‘Claudia stopped being competition the second she left.’ Peter looked aghast.

‘Yes, but Stiles hadn’t.’ Laura replied. ‘And even though he was a child, Deaton seemed to deem him enough of a threat to convince her that Claudia’s dementia would betray us all.’

‘Ironic that two years later we were all nearly wiped out anyway.’ Peter tipped his head back, shaking it as he closed his eyes and scrubbed both hands over his face. ‘What a fucking mess.’

‘No shit.’ Laura started the car. ‘I didn’t ask him much else but I think we can both put the pieces together now. Claudia was clearly coming to see us and Stiles and Derek were friends.’

‘More than friends.’ Peter glanced at her. ‘Matching tokens, Laura. You know what that means.’

‘They were so young though.’ Laura hadn’t wanted to admit it. ‘How would it even work?’

‘The same way people all over the world do it when they’ve grown up together.’ Peter replied. ‘And when the time was right, they would have formalised it.’

‘Jesus.’ Laura’s claws were threatening to make an appearance again. ‘So Mom didn’t just take away Derek’s best friend, she took away his potential mate?’

‘Looks like.’ Peter made a face. ‘Dibs on not being the one to tell him that.’

‘Fuck.’ Laura finally gave in and clawed the cover to shreds. ‘That’s going to be a barrel of laughs.’

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‘So.’ Stiles leaned against the locker and regarded Derek. Curiosity made him smell like tart green apples and Derek hid a smile.

‘So.’ he replied, taking out his books for first period. ‘Are you planning on finishing that thought?’

Stiles rolled his eyes at him and it just made Derek want to smash their faces together. He bit back the urge to bury his face in Stiles neck and waited.

‘This whole matching thing.’ Stiles said it with emphasis. ‘Any thoughts?’

‘What did Peter tell you?’ Derek hedged and Stiles glared at him.

‘Nothing actually.’ he replied. ‘Just that my grandmother was supposedly a witch.’

‘Well, doesn’t that tie in with your theories?’ Derek grinned. ‘I mean it’s the sort of thing a witch would wear. Also pagans.’

‘See yes, maybe at first I thought that.’ Stiles narrowed his eyes at him and Derek let himself get lost for a moment. ‘But then I started reading her journal and it looks like honest-to-God actual witchcraft.’

‘Some people take it seriously.’ Derek was starting to enjoy himself. ‘Maybe she was a devotee.’

‘Ha ha, Hale.’ Stiles retorted. ‘See, I know you’re fucking with me. You know way more than you’re letting on, I’d bet my left nut on it.’

‘Okay, fine.’ Derek said. ‘It’s a family thing. We get something like it on our tenth birthday. It’s unique to the person, but we have the same one.’

‘Well, I don’t know if it’s mine.’ Stiles looked a little doubtful. ‘I did find it in the greenhouse.’

‘It’s yours.’ Derek caught hold of his arm and pulled him out the way of the crowd. ‘I know it is. And if you’ve got it, then...’

‘Then what?’ Stiles frowned. ‘We know each other? Sorry dude, I may be ADHD but I would definitely remember you.’

‘Really?’ That made Derek feel inordinately pleased. ‘You would?’

‘Don’t front.’ Stiles was now going a charming shade of pink under his moles. ‘You know you’re hot. Anyone would remember you.’

‘I don’t care about anyone.’ Derek smiled at him and heard Stiles’ heart skip a beat. ‘I only care about you remembering me. Also, I’m kind of riding high on the fact that you think I’m hot.’

‘Of course he does, dumbass.’ It was Erica, materialising out of nowhere next to them. ‘You can see it all over his face.’ She beamed at both of them and Derek let out the tiniest subsonic growl to tell her to go away but she just fluttered her eyelashes and ignored him. ‘What Derek hasn’t told you Stiles, is that the feeling is absolutely mutual.’

‘Erica.’ Derek growled, trying to sound less wolflike than he actually was. ‘We were having a private conversation here.’

‘Not anymore.’ Erica trilled. ‘You’re both about to be late for homeroom.’

‘Shit.’ Stiles looked around him. ‘I need to go!’

‘We’ll see you at lunch!’ Erica called after him as he bolted and then linked her arm through Derek’s. ‘You’re welcome, by the way.’

‘I hate you.’ he muttered, letting her drag him off, but not before he’d inhaled the last bit of Stiles’ scent still lingering around them.

‘No you don’t.’ She leaned her head on his shoulder. ‘He’s cute and he likes you. We can all smell it. Just because we’ve gone to Defcon 3 doesn’t mean you can’t get some.’

‘Well, that’s cute.’ Derek grumbled, but he leaned into her as well. ‘He is cute though.’

‘Huzzah.’ Erica laughed. ‘We’ve finally found someone you’re interested in.’

Derek smiled and kept his opinions to himself. He could admit that he wasn’t just interested. Now he knew what to look for, Laura was right. There was a connection there, warm and soft and just starting to bloom but undeniably there.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Okay so a note here. This is going waaaaaay more slow burn than I thought it would ahahahhahahhah. Just a heads up. Do not expect any action of the smutty kind soon LOL. I've also updated the tags re. a question about Derek being full shift. In this AU, all the born wolves are full shift, but the bitten ones aren't. They do all go running on the full moon though, although Jackson spends most of it crawling in the trees :DDDD

Stiles went to English grinning. Finstock had called him Bilinski throughout Economics and then launched into a bizarre monologue on skirt lengths and bear markets and Lydia had rolled her eyes at him. Allison was on her other side and Stiles couldn't help but notice that there were some very interesting looks being exchanged, like they knew a secret. In front of them Jackson and Danny also seemed to be in on it, both of them acknowledging Allison with a nod. She seemed a lot more relaxed though, smiling at Stiles and lending him a pen when he found that his had mysteriously been swiped (probably Scott - he never seemed to have his own stationery) and he found himself really enjoying the class.

Now he was bouncing along, his heart speeding up when he saw Derek leaning against the wall. His green eyes tracked Stiles all the way to him, a smile playing at the corners of his mouth.

'Sorry we got interrupted this morning.' he said and Stiles went pink with pleasure.

'Was she right though?' he asked, internally screaming at his own boldness. 'About it being mutual.'

'Yeah.' Derek tilted his head, and then glared down the hall. There was a cackle that sounded like Erica but Stiles couldn't see her in the throng of students.

'Well that's good.' He rubbed the back of his neck, shuffling his feet and wincing when his chucks squeaked on the lino. 'I mean, I'd hate to make a fool out of myself.'

'You won't.' Derek was leaning in and for a second, Stiles thought he was about to be kissed. But then Derek reached out and ran a finger under the chain around his neck, pulling out the pendant. His eyes went wide when he saw it.

'Can I see yours?' Stiles asked and Derek nodded and did the same. His was shinier with little oxidation, like he cared for it and polished it regularly. Then Stiles remembered what he'd said about it being something he'd gotten from his family and understood the connection. It was why he babied Roscoe the way he did.

'Just like yours.' Derek's voice was soft, his eyes fixed on Stiles' face. 'So I have a question to ask you.'

'Uh huh?' Stiles resisted the urge to clasp his hands like a blushing maiden. He made to lean against the lockers, misjudged the distance and flailed wildly until Derek caught him and set him upright.

‘You okay there?’ he asked, his eyes sparkling. Stiles bit his lip, trying not to whimper. Whimpering would be bad and completely wreck any cool he might have managed to garner so far.

‘I’m just kind of clumsy.’ he said and then, completely without thinking, reached out and grabbed Derek’s bicep. He was wearing a grey henley and it did nothing to hide the definition and Stiles shamelessly groped him. ‘What the hell is your workout routine, man? You’re like zero percent body fat. Although that’s not really a good thing, I mean you need fat to protect your internal organs otherwise you’d be like total shark chum.’

Derek’s dark eyebrows did a complicated dance that ended up on confused.

‘Your mind moves so fast.’ he said but unlike most people, Derek actually sounded impressed and Stiles couldn’t help but preen a little.

‘You wanted to ask me a question.’ he ventured and Derek’s expression cleared.

‘Laura said she’d like it you came round for dinner.’ he replied. ‘And so would I. Obviously.’ The last bit was a bit rushed and it completely charmed Stiles how unused to asking anyone out Derek seemed to be.

‘When?’ he asked and Derek smiled, relaxing visibly.

‘Friday. I’ve got practice but we always do something at my house on Friday nights after.’

‘Oh.’ Stiles deflated a little bit. ‘So everyone will be there?’ Maybe it wasn’t a date so much as Derek just being friendly, in spite of what Erica had said.

‘No!’ Derek practically yelled and then immediately backtracked. ‘I mean, I’d invite you to go somewhere it was just us, but Laura’s kind of insistent about us bringing home the people we like.’

‘We?’ Stiles pressed, grinning. Derek huffed and rolled his eyes, but it was clear he wasn’t annoyed.

‘Fine. I. I would like you to come have dinner with my crazy ass family and the pack of wild animals I call my friends.’ he said and Stiles beamed.

‘And I would be delighted to accept.’ he replied and attempted a courtly bow, only to nearly take out a passing kid with the sweep of his hand.

‘Sorry.’ Derek was snickering. He pulled Stiles out of the way and towards the classroom. ‘Good. I’ll tell Laura. Is there anything you don’t eat or you’re allergic to?’

‘Nope.’ Stiles let himself be pulled along, the spot where Derek’s hand was around his arm warm and tingly. ‘But I eat a lot.’

Derek burst out laughing, his eyes widening before he squeezed them shut and crinkled his nose and Stiles wanted desperately to grab his face and kiss the daylights out of him.

‘That’s not a problem.’ he replied as they went to their seats. ‘You haven’t seen us eat yet.’

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Scott went into Spanish with some reservations. He had avoided Matt and Tracy and Theo before homeroom, keeping his head down during and then getting out before they could catch up with him. He was feeling more than a little bit shitty for his behaviour the past few days and that made him angry because it wasn’t usually him that Noah got pissed at, but he’d been pissed the night

before. After he and Stiles had come up to bed, Scott had spent a couple of hours texting Theo back and forth. He'd avoided asking outright but he'd gotten an answer when he'd skirted around the subject of Erica and Isaac and Theo had been all too keen to tell him about what they'd done to them. He'd also been dismissive of Naoh's concerns and told Scott that the Hales were well known for being the ones who caused most of the shit in town.

Scott wasn't a mean person at heart. He knew that what Theo was telling him meant he really should be avoiding them and he also knew he'd hurt Stiles' feelings the day before but he was also tired of being seen as just Stiles' step-brother. Even though Stiles was a trouble magnet, people still liked him and Scott wanted that for himself.

So when Matt and Tracy cornered him at the back of the classroom with matching grins that skirted just a little too close to being like those of the pair of Siamese cats in *Lady and the Tramp*, he caved.

'Hi.' He scooted back a bit when Matt leaned in on his desk.

'So.' Matt's grin was wide. 'Theo wants to know why you're avoiding us today.'

'I'm not.' Scott protested. 'I'm just settling in.'

'Uh huh.' Tracy sat down and gave him a unimpressed look. 'Wouldn't have anything to do with your brother going apeshit and beating the crap out of him and Donovan yesterday. You know that he could have gone to the principal, right. Then him and that other freak would have been suspended. Not a good look for your first day at school.'

'Stiles said he was just defending himself.' Scott muttered, eyes on his desk.

'Come on.' Tracy snorted. 'You've told us what he's like. And Derek Hale is well known for getting physical with people. There was a senior last year that hit on Cora Hale and Derek had him up against the goddamn wall. He nearly strangled the dude. He's violent and everyone around here with half a brain knows he murdered Paige Krasikeva.'

Scott chewed on his lip. He wasn't like Stiles and so he hadn't dug through the entire town's history but Theo had told him the night before that Derek's freshman girlfriend had been murdered and everyone knew that Derek had been the one to do it.

'I don't know...' he started but Matt slapped both hands down on the desk just as the teacher walked in.

'Trust us.' He took his seat. 'Meet us in the lot at lunch. We'll prove it.'

-

English class finished and Stiles gathered up his things, shoving them into his backpack. Derek bumped him on his way past and Stiles smiled and was about to follow when Miss Blake caught his eye and beckoned him over.

'Stiles.' She looked expectant. 'A word please.'

Stiles frowned. He didn't think he'd done anything wrong and when he glanced at Derek, he saw he was looking bemused as well.

'I'll catch up with you outside.' he said and Stiles nodded and made his way between the desks over to Miss Blake.

‘Miss Blake?’ He waited until she looked up at him. ‘Did I do something wrong?’

‘Oh no.’ Miss Blake said. ‘I just wanted to check if you were settling in alright.’

‘It’s only been two days.’ Stiles replied. ‘I’m fine though.’

‘I see you’re already making friends.’ Miss Blake observed. ‘That’s good. I’m new in town myself, I know how hard it can be in a place that you don’t know.’

‘I’m fine.’ Stiles repeated. ‘And yeah, Derek’s cool.’

‘I’m glad to hear that.’ Miss Blake leaned over and something in Stiles felt a sudden flash of revulsion. He stepped back but not before her fingertips brushed along his arm. It was like the opposite of what he’d felt when Derek was touching him. It made his skin crawl and he folded his arms to get them out the way. Miss Blake looked taken aback and he gave her a sheepish grin.

‘Sorry.’ he said. ‘I’m not comfortable with being touched.’

‘It didn’t look like that earlier.’ Miss Blake was now looking at him intently, her dark grey eyes glittering. ‘But appearances can be deceiving. Are you a virgin, Stiles?’

Stiles nearly choked on his own saliva. He was so completely appalled by the question that he was speechless until the door to the classroom slammed open and Derek leaned in. He looked pretty incensed and Stiles could have sworn that there was something a little bit off about his face.

‘Stiles.’ He even sounded different. ‘We need to go or we’ll be late for class.’

‘Yeah, I’m on my way.’ Stiles took the opportunity to scuttle away. ‘See you tomorrow, Miss Blake.’

‘Of course.’ Miss Blake was now looking as prim as ever, like she hadn’t just been giving Stiles creepy vibes and asking him overly personal questions. ‘You should run along.’

Stiles didn’t need to be asked twice. Once he was outside he gave Derek a grateful smile, although it was shaky.

‘Thanks.’ He glanced back at the classroom. ‘She was being super weird.’

‘I heard.’ Derek muttered. ‘What kind of teacher asks students if they’re virgins.’

‘You heard that?’ Stiles frowned. ‘Damn. How the hell did you hear her through a closed door?’

‘I have really good senses.’ Derek was almost herding him away. ‘And I don’t like what I just heard.’

‘No shit.’ Stiles glanced back down at his arm, where Derek was almost gripping the place where Miss Blake had touched him. ‘You can let go now.’

‘Oh.’ Derek let go as if he’d been burned. ‘Sorry.’

‘No, it’s cool.’ Stiles took over, rubbing at where he still felt uncomfortable. ‘I like it when you touch me. She just made me feel...icky.’

‘Icky?’ Derek was gaping at him. ‘She pretty much molested you!’

‘Well no.’ Stiles told him. ‘I mean she just, like, brushed me with her fingers. It just felt super-bad

touch.'

'I still don't like it.' Derek glowered, then brightened a little. 'You like it when I touch you though?' There was a wicked little slant to his mouth when he said it and Stiles went pink. Again. It seemed to be happening a lot around Derek.

'Shut up.' He punched Derek in the arm and then instantly regretted it. 'And once again, what the fuck dude?' He cradled his hand and gave Derek a baleful look. 'A hundred and forty-seven pounds of skinny white guy here.'

'That's okay.' It was Boyd, coming up behind them with a grin of his own. 'Derek likes it.'

'So I'm starting to believe.' Stiles was about to do the same to him, eyed Boyd's biceps, which were even bigger than Derek's, and thought better of it. 'Are you my escort for the next stage of my day?'

'I don't trust Theo not to try anything.' Derek grumbled. 'You sitting with us at lunch, right?'

'Wouldn't miss it.' Stiles replied and watched Derek stomp off still muttering. Boyd was watching him go, his eyes distant when Stiles nudged him.

'Library?' he asked and Boyd seemed to come back to himself.

'Sure.' he replied. 'Let's go.'

To Stiles' surprise though, when they got to the library there was a tall lanky figure waiting for them, half concealed in the shadows under the awning.

'Hey.' Boyd held out his fist and Isaac obligingly bumped it.

'Thought I'd come study.' he said, but the look he was giving Boyd was meaningful. 'Seeing as we're supposed to go around in pairs.'

'Why?' Stiles asked, curious.

'Theo's known for cornering people who are alone.' Boyd said smoothly, almost like it was rehearsed. 'We try not to give him the opportunity.'

Stiles regarded him and his acres of muscles.

'He's have to be brain dead to try anything with you.' he replied and got a smile with actual teeth in it.

'Still. Isaac fell into step on his other side. 'We like to take care of our own.'

They went to the back table and started working. Stiles darted quick glances at Isaac. Apart from knowing that he was Cora's boyfriend and what Noah had said about him being orphaned when his father, a prior swimming coach at BHHS who'd developed a serious drinking problem after his mother's death, had wrapped his car around a lamppost the previous year.

Isaac looked up from his physics textbook and saw him looking.

'Ask.' he said. 'Everyone always wants to.'

'No, it's cool.' Stiles shrugged. 'I know what it's like to feel like everyone is talking about you.'

'My mom had cancer.' Isaac was matter of fact. 'She died when I was thirteen. My dad started drinking and he wasn't a very nice person when he was drunk. He used to hurt me and my brother so Cam joined the army when he graduated just to get away from him. Now he's my official guardian but he's on active service so I don't get to see him very often. Laura looks after me.'

'I'm sorry.' Stiles said and meant it. 'Mine had fronto-temporal dementia.'

'Jesus.' Boyd muttered. 'The level of tragedy at this goddamn table is ridiculous.'

Isaac was smiling though. He shrugged, his shoulders jerking.

'It could have been worse.' he replied. 'Laura managed to keep me out of foster care even though I was still sixteen. She also helped out with the insurance, so the house is paid off and Cam and I have enough money to keep us.'

'You live in a graveyard though.' Boyd pointed out. 'Not the happiest place.'

'It suits us.' Isaac said and Stiles could just hear there was a story there. 'And it's a classy area. Jackson's just across the road.'

They exchanged looks and then started snickering and Stiles found himself joining in.

'I live in my dead grandmother's house.' he offered. 'That's as spooky as it gets.'

'We always wondered what it was like.' Isaac said. 'We go past on the way to the pa...I mean to Derek and Cora's house.'

Stiles raised an eyebrow at him but Isaac just blinked guileless blue eyes at him and went pack to Newton's Laws.

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Derek was only half paying attention. He'd spent a lot of time with related packs down in Mexico and so was fluent in Spanish to the point where he didn't really have to pay attention. Next to him, Erica was in a similar state. Her dad had been from Miami, the first generation of Cuban immigrants who'd then married her mother when he'd moved to California and subsequently run off with a croupier he'd met on one of his gambling trips to Las Vegas. Erica liked to joke that he'd left her with her big brown eyes, bilingualism and her long legs but not much else.

He felt her eyes on him and glanced over to see her pop her gum obnoxiously and give him a toothy smile. Derek glared at her but Erica let nobody cow her and she simply scribbled something on a piece of paper and casually flicked it onto his desk. When Derek unfolded it, he found a scarily well-executed sketch of him blowing Stiles. Erica had gotten really creative with the distribution of moles.

Her snicker was loud enough to draw the attention of Senora Garcia and they both looked mollified and went back to reading the comprehension text she'd given them. Derek leaned over as discreetly as he could, easing out a claw that he used to poke Erica in the thigh with. It went right through her skinny jeans and she yelped and then had to quickly school her face into a neutral expression when she was glared at.

'Quit it.' he mouthed when the teacher had her back turned and Erica stuck her tongue on her cheek and circled it around, looking completely unrepentant. It was a well known fact that she and Boyd went at it like rabbits, which of course was the source of much amusement and faux-disgust amongst the pack.

The rest of the class passed by without incident. Erica sidled over with a grin after the bell rang and leaned into him and Derek relented and snuffled her hair. They sometimes aggravated each other no end but she was like another sister to him and he always quickly forgave her more outrageous teasing.

Outside class he decided to tell her about Miss Blake and the comment she'd made.

'She also scented him.' he snorted, annoyed all over again.

'How would she know how to do that?' Erica asked, genuinely curious.

'Okay, maybe scenting is too strong a word.' Derek slammed his locker shut. 'But she was being proprietary.'

'Oh.' Erica drew the syllable out. 'Is that a little bit of possessiveness I hear coming through? If you're that concerned, just ask him out.'

'I have already.' Derek was smug. 'He's coming for dinner on Friday.'

'But that's just pack night.' Erica hissed. 'I mean a proper date. The two of you, somewhere romantic maybe. You could show him the lake? Maybe talk him into skinny dipping.'

'I don't think that's quite appropriate.' Derek frowned. 'We've only just met.'

'And that's why you're still a virgin.' Erica trilled. 'Hey, what did he answer by the way?'

'He didn't.' Derek replied. 'Why?'

'Oh God.' Erica huffed. 'If he's also a virgin, it will take you two forever to get to first base, never mind hitting a home run.'

'I hate it when you make baseball sex analogies.' Derek grumbled but now she'd asked the question, he couldn't stop thinking about it. He doubted it was true. Stiles was effortlessly hot, like he had no idea just how cute he was with his messy hair and tattoos and piercings and he'd lived in San Francisco and had probably had a ton of girlfriends and boyfriends. He wasn't some small town basketball player who's past had made him so cut off from even wanting to be with someone that he'd turned down everybody who had ever offered.

Kate had wanted to fuck him. She'd made that very clear with her sugary words and sly touches and, at thirteen and full of hormones, Derek had been torn between wanting to do it and wanting to run and hide behind his mom. Paige had eventually put paid to that when she'd found out and Derek wasn't so stupid that he hadn't been able to connect her death with Kate's threats even before she'd told him that she'd killed Paige because he wouldn't cooperate. After that, Kate had stepped up her harassment until he'd finally broken down and told Talia and she'd taken steps. Two months later, their house had been burned down with the pack inside and Derek knew it had been Kate. He'd felt ripped up by his guilt and shame and he'd never told anyone of the connection between the substitute teacher and the death of his best friend and his pack.

Derek knew he wasn't responsible on an intellectual level, that Kate was a sexual predator and a murderer, but that didn't stop him from trying to make sure it never happened again by never connecting with anyone but Stiles was breaking through his self-imposed isolation without even trying and part of Derek wondered if this was the person he'd be able to move on with, especially if it did turn out that Stiles could be his mate.

It wasn't until Erica headed to the art studio and he went to the library that he perked up, catching

the lingering scent of Stiles at the back of the mezzanine where he'd clearly been studying with Isaac and Boyd. Lydia was already there, working on her extra credit assignment for her AP Physics class.

'Hi.' She gave him only a cursory glance. 'I hear Stiles is coming over on Friday night.'

'News travels fast.' Derek flopped into the chair opposite as Lydia waved her phone, resplendent in a pink bedazzled case, at him.

'The miracles of modern communications,' she said dryly. 'Peter's so excited he's declared the kitchen off limits. I actually think he's going to start prepping tonight.'

'Jesus.' Derek dug out his notebook. 'It's literally only Tuesday.'

'Laura told me he gave Stiles Aneta's grimoire.' Lydia tapped a nail against her book. 'I think I may need to come by the bookshop this afternoon. Lend a hand with whatever he might want to ask.'

'It's going to be like Grand Central Station.' Derek sighed, his hopes for a little downtime evaporating. Lydia and Peter together were like a force of nature.

'As he asked you about it?' Lydia asked and he shook his head.

'I wouldn't expect him to,' he replied. 'He'll probably keep all his questions for Peter.'

'Hmmm.' Lydia started reading again. 'Probably.'

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Stiles made it to chemistry and found Scott sitting at the back next to someone he didn't recognise. He avoided Stiles' eyes and Stiles couldn't help but notice that Theo was on the other side of the room, grinning at him in a way that Stiles did not appreciate at all. Donovan was definitely missing, no doubt off sick. The only other seat was next to a pretty black girl, her smile friendly and her long black hair pulled into a side ponytail.

'You can come sit next to me,' she offered and Stiles took the seat gratefully.

'Thanks.' He glanced back at Scott. 'I think I've been ditched.'

'No problem,' the girl said and held out a hand. 'I'm Harley.'

'Cool name.' Stiles grinned and she laughed.

'It's for the motorcycle and not the comic book character,' she replied. 'My dad runs the local body shop downtown. He's pretty obsessed with engines of every kind.'

'I'm Stiles,' Stiles said and she gave him an assessing look.

'I know.' She smirked a little. 'Everyone's talking about you.'

'Why?' Stiles asked. 'I literally just got here.'

'And yet in two days you've managed to infiltrate the Wolf Pack and get Derek Hale to escort you around campus,' Harley replied. 'Trust me, you've been noticed. Those are just the cherry on the cake.' She nodded at his tattoos. 'They're pretty sweet. I want to get one but my dad is a stickler for me being eighteen.'

'Yeah, mine was too.' Stiles smiled. 'Being the son of the Sheriff will do that to you.'

'I know.' Harley laughed. 'I should probably mention that my mom works for him.'

'No shit.' Stiles said. 'I don't know all the deputies yet, I must confess.'

'Deputy Graeme.' Harley explained. 'Tara if she decides she likes you. She says your dad is cool though, that he seems like a good guy.'

'He is.' Stiles replied. 'And I'm happier that he's working out his career here rather than in San Francisco. It seems pretty quiet.'

'Maybe.' Harley tilted her head and glanced behind them. 'If you avoid the assholes. It's all over school that you're the one that did that to Donovan's nose.'

'Guilty as charged.' Stiles took a fierce pleasure in saying it. 'But I haven't made it this far by letting people walk over me, especially when they can't keep their hands to themselves.'

'Oh God, I know.' Harley made a face. 'I'm on the swim team and they always come and ogle us at practice. It's super creepy.'

Stiles was going to reply but then Harris walked in and class started with the announcement of a pop quiz.

'Damn.' Harley muttered. 'He's not playing games today. If you need to, you can copy off me.'

'No thanks.' Stiles replied, thankful he'd read ahead in study hall. 'I think I've got this.'

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Derek finished the chapter analysis he was working on and then rested his chin on his hand and looked at Lydia. She didn't respond, but he knew she was aware of his attention.

'What?' she eventually asked and he sat back and folded his arms.

'So this is not me asking for help.' he said and she snorted loudly.

'Bullshit, but go on.' she replied. 'What do you want to know?'

'You and Laura.' he said. 'Have you ever had the mate talk?'

'Of course.' Lydia replied, finally looking up. 'It was one of the first things we talked about when we got together.'

'And?' Derek asked. 'What do you think?'

'That it's an old fashioned overly romantic concept.' Lydia replied. 'One neither of us subscribe to. I don't need some mystical emotional bond to tell me I love your sister.'

'She thinks Stiles might be mine.' Derek said and just telling someone else made his heart start pounding.

'If that's the case, shouldn't you be happy?' Lydia studied him. 'I know you're the male equivalent of Elsa but still.'

Derek looked at her. Lydia was the one person he had ever got close to telling about Kate, but now,

like all the other occasions, he closed his mouth and shook his head.

‘I feel something,’ he finally said. ‘I like him. I want to get to know him. I just have no idea how and Erica laughed at me because she said I should have asked him on a proper date and not to have dinner with us.’

‘I think it’s a good idea, personally.’ Lydia told him. ‘We can all get to hang out and he can see what he’s letting himself in for.’ Her lips curved up. ‘Not that I think he’ll be put off. Erica is right when she says he really likes you.’

Derek smiled at that, getting up and packing up for lunch.

‘How much would the pack mind if I stole him for lunch.’ he asked and she grinned.

‘Not at all.’ she replied, swinging her purse over her shoulder and gathering up her books. ‘In fact, I’ll even run interference for you.’

‘Thanks.’ he said, gently leaning into her.

‘Hey, what are sisters-in-law for anyway.’ Lydia laughed and took his arm. ‘Now let’s go get your boytoy.’

‘Christ.’ Derek muttered but he could smell how happy she was. Lydia was like an extension of Laura, kind and stern and scary as hell when anyone hurt her pack and he loved her just as much as he loved Laura and Cora and Erica.

If only she wouldn’t tease him so much, but then again it did go with the territory.

The cafeteria was empty enough that he could stand at the doorway and lurk while he waited for Stiles. Jackson and Danny arrived first and his cousin stopped dead and gave him a quizzical look.

‘Just keep moving.’ Derek hissed at him. ‘I’m waiting for Stiles.’

‘Ha!’ Danny gave Jackson an arch look. ‘You owe me fifty bucks.’

‘Whatever.’ Jackson said and turned back to Derek. ‘If you need advice on how to give stellar blowjobs, message me later.’

‘Thanks.’ Derek drawled. ‘I’ll be sure to keep that in mind.’

‘Just saying.’ Jackson’s smile was wicked. ‘Blowjobs keep a boyfriend happy.’

‘That they do.’ Danny beamed and took his hand. ‘As does buying me a double portion of chocolate pudding.’

Derek huffed and glanced back at Lydia, who gave him a go on gesture. He listened, catching the sounds of the students coming down the stairs and along the corridors to the cafeteria and took a deep breath, focusing his senses.

It took a moment for him to find it amongst the noise of the others, slightly elevated and with a little erratic blip that identified Stiles as clearly as his scent did. Derek smiled and tracked it, coming closer and closer until Stiles walked through the doors and Derek could reach out and catch his hand.

‘Hey.’ he said and was rewarded with a brilliant smile.

'Hey.' Stiles replied. 'Were you waiting for me?'

'I thought we could eat outside.' Derek offered. He hadn't really planned ahead but he always brought enough food for at least three humans. He could forgo his snacks to share with Stiles.

'Okay.' Stiles glanced back at the approaching crowds. 'I told Scott to come sit with us today but I think he's probably going to skip out.'

'The others will be cool if he turns up.' Derek assured him. Stiles' hand was warm and solid in his and it felt so incredibly right that it was making him a little breathless. 'There's a nice spot out back under the trees.'

'Like a picnic?' The mischief was clear in Stiles' eyes. 'Lead the way, big guy.'

Derek avoided looking at the others as he and Stiles passed their table. They would probably do something dorky like give him the thumbs up, so he kept his head down and held fast to Stiles' hand until they were outside. There was a concrete path that led to the back quad with its shady trees and benches and they were early enough that Derek could lead Stiles to the furthest one. They sat down, Stiles taking the same side as him, and Derek unpacked his lunch. Peter was a stickler for a balanced diet and so today's sandwiches were BLT, three of them stacked and cut across, three packets of potato chips, two Snickers and a couple of bottles of water. Derek's metabolism ran at a crazy speed but splitting his lunch with Stiles would definitely be worth the rumble in his stomach later.

'Did you plan this?' Stiles looked utterly delighted as Derek spilt the food and handed him over his sandwiches.

'Not exactly.' he confessed. 'But I wanted to talk to you without all the noise.'

'Good.' Stiles was looking charmed, his cheeks flushed. 'I kind of wanted to talk to you too. I have some questions.'

'Okay.' Derek agreed. 'But food first, questions after.'

'Okay.' Stiles grinned and his scent was sweet and happy and Derek started eating, breathing in as discreetly as he could while Stiles ate like someone who hadn't seen food for weeks. It made his own food more enjoyable, sharing with someone he felt a connection too. Something twiggled in the back of his head, an old talk about courtship and the drive to protect and provide food and Derek hid a smile, thinking about what Stiles would say if he figured that out.

When they were done, he gathered up the wreckage and dumped it in the trash and came back to find Stiles with his feet up on the bench and his arms wrapped around them, smelling completely at ease.

'Peter gave me my grandmother's journal.' he said and Derek nodded and mirrored his position on the opposite bench.

'I know.' he replied. 'He told us.'

Stiles' dark eyes narrowed and Derek could almost hear his brain working.

'Peter said she was a witch.' He regarded Derek intently. 'I know now that maybe that wasn't just a way of putting things.' he fell silent and looked into the distance.

'Okay.' Derek kept his cool, waiting.

‘I’ve been having dreams.’ Stiles finally said, after picking at his laces for a few minutes. ‘About the town, about my mom and being here. There’s a house and I know it’s yours. I mean, your old house. From before the fire.’

Derek held his breath, barely able to even dare hope that Stiles was saying what he thought he was saying.

‘What do you think it means.’ he asked, keeping his eyes on his own feet.

‘My dad says that once is an incident, twice is a coincidence and three times is a pattern.’ Stiles turned so he was facing Derek. ‘I’ve been here before, haven’t I?’

Derek did the same and met his eyes. They looked at each other for a moment and then he nodded.

‘We think so.’ he replied. ‘I’ve been having dreams about you too. We’re a lot younger and your mom is there. We used to play together.’

‘I knew it.’ Stiles’s eyes gleamed and his smile widened and then faltered. ‘But why don’t I remember you? I mean, I had no idea until we moved here and all this weird shit started happening.’

‘We’re still trying to figure that out.’ Derek told him. ‘Peter’s having dreams too. I don’t know why we don’t remember either but he thinks the reason we’re remembering now is because you’ve come back to Beacon Hills.’

It didn’t take long for Stiles’ face to change into an expression of complete and utter amazement and Derek wished he’d had the foresight to take a picture of it because it really was something to see.

‘Oh my God!’ he squeaked. ‘I’m magic!’

Derek started laughing. He couldn’t help it, the look on Stiles’ face and his apparent delight at his deduction were both so endearing.

‘We think so.’ he replied. ‘That’s why the journal unlocked the cabinet and practically brained you.’

‘It did that!?’ Stiles heart was racing. ‘Holy shit. So what, I’m basically Merlin?’

‘Not unless you’re a centuries old wizard from Britannia.’ Derek deadpanned. ‘But you’re pretty special. I don’t know all of it. That’s Peter’s thing. He’ll be able to explain it better.’

‘Cool.’ Stiles beamed at him and then started digging frantically through his backpack. He took out the leather bound journal. Derek vaguely recognised it from when Peter had cleared out Aneta’s books just before her death. He looked at it with open curiosity, unable to stop his nose twitching when he caught its scent. It was like Stiles’ own, edged with electricity and woven through with the smells of Aneta’s garden and what was obviously her own deeper scent.

‘I started reading it last night.’ Stiles said. ‘It’s in Polish so it’s been kind of slow going but there’s something she mentions, and it’s something I’ve dreamed about.’

Derek shivered. He knew what was coming, even though he had no idea how.

‘The Nemeton.’ he said and Stiles looked astonished and then extremely pleased.

'The Nemeton.' he confirmed. 'You know it?'

'It's very special to my family.' Derek replied. 'You dream about it?'

'Last night I was there, playing with my mom.' Stiles swallowed hard and picked up the journal, his fingers drifting over the cover. 'Then she disappeared and I was alone until my babcia came to me. I've never met her or even seen a picture of her, but I knew it was her.' He smiled and Derek's heart ached for him, at the melancholy in it. 'And she told me that I belonged here and that I needed to start learning again because of what I am. I didn't get it until now.' He startled suddenly and Derek gave him a quizzical look. 'And she told me I needed to find my way back and that I'd have a guide. Then she also disappeared but when I turned around, there was this big ass wolf behind me.'

That caught Derek completely by surprise and he sprayed the mouthful of water he'd just taken right across the table. Thankfully, Stiles was holding the journal out the way or it would have had an unexpected deluge. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and gave Stiles an apologetic grin.

'Sorry. Did you just say a wolf?'

'Yeah.' Stiles was making a bemused face at him. 'Are you okay?'

'Fine.' Derek waved a hand at him. 'What did it look like?'

'Black.' Stiles replied promptly. 'With these amazing gold eyes that sort of glowed. He was amazing.' His grin was back. 'He even let me cuddle him.'

'No shit.' Derek was flabbergasted. 'You weren't scared?'

'Of him? Nah.' Stiles smiled. 'He was so soft and really warm and I knew somehow that he'd never hurt me. Oh, do you think he's out there somewhere? I'm pretty sure I've heard howling since we got here.'

'There are no wolves in California.' Derek parroted the line they all used. 'Can't have been him.'

'I don't know.' Stiles said, his smile turning dreamy.

'What did you do?' Derek clenched his fists under the table, willing his claws to stay in. His own heart was beating so hard it felt like it was thumping against his ribs. 'When you heard the howl?'

'I answered it of course.' Stiles laughed. Then his eyes went wide again and he gaped at Derek. 'Dude! You taught me to do that!'

That was enough to make Derek smile so hard his face ached from it.

'You remember.' He kicked at Stiles' feet under the table.

'You're such an asshole.' Stiles was still laughing. 'I used to howl and you'd tell me that I sounded like a cat screaming.'

That was a detail Derek hadn't remembered but it felt so right that he just nodded.

'This is so cool.' Stiles enthused. He reached up and toyed with the pendant. 'Guess this makes more sense now too.'

'Yeah, it definitely does.' Derek replied. 'You're coming to the shop after school though?'

‘Hell yeah.’ Stiles bounced in his seat. ‘Just try and keep me away.’

Derek rested his chin on his hand and smiled at him. Keeping Stiles away was literally the last thing he’d ever wanted to do. He couldn’t wait to see what the reaction would be later when Peter started showing Stiles what else he had hidden away.

It all felt like things were coalescing perfectly.

Chapter 10

Scott stared at the folder. It was plain brown card, the name Derek Hale written on the tab in bold printed letters.

‘Should we even be looking at this?’ he asked, suddenly wanting to be anywhere else than where he was, which was down in the bowels of the school. He hadn’t been expecting to be bundled down there by Tracy and Matt, herded through a maintenance door at the back of the school and along past the gym equipment storage cages, through the pumps and pipes that fed the swimming pool until they were deep enough that he knew he wouldn’t be able to find his way out.

Theo and Donovan had been waiting for them and they’d sat him down on a step and handed him the folder. This was apparently the proof of Derek’s transgressions, supplied by Tracy. Her father was an attorney that worked for the D.A. and he’d been the one to take on Derek’s case when he’d been the main suspect in the murder of Paige Krasikeva, the girl that Tracy and Matt said he’d murdered.

‘Look at it.’ Theo ordered and Scott was shocked at how cold his voice was. This wasn’t the guy that he thought he was getting to know. Down here in the shadows, they all looked cruel and more than a little thuggish and he desperately regretted not listening to Stiles. Hands trembling, he opened the file and inhaled sharply when he saw the photograph of a girl’s body lying on a concrete floor. Her neck was bent at an unnatural angle, the pale skin lived red and purple with bruising and her dark eyes were open and sightless.

Scott gasped in shock and dropped the folder, papers going everywhere. He tried to get up from the step he was sitting on and felt two hands on his shoulders, slamming him back down. He whimpered and Donovan leaned in, his breath washing over the back of Scott’s neck.

‘Look at it, asshole.’ Theo spat. ‘Look at what your brother’s boyfriend did.’

Tracy was gathering up the papers. She shoved them into Scott’s hands and he started to read. There was all kinds of documents in there from the coroner’s report (he caught the words fractured cervical vertebrae and fall from height and shuddered) to a transcribed witness statement from Derek. He didn’t need to be Noah’s step-son to know that nobody should have been able to access any of it.

‘I don’t think we should be looking at this.’ he ventured and Tracy snorted.

‘And we don’t think Derek should have thrown Paige to her death.’ she drawled. ‘But we don’t always get what we want.’

She folded her arms and Scott looked up at all of them, realised he was going nowhere and started to read.

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Stiles went to class after lunch with stars in his eyes. Lydia snorted next to him and steered him into the room where they had AP World History.

‘You’re about as transparent as a window pane.’ she smiled. ‘Both of you.’

They sat down and then looked up as Allison came in. She gave them both a small wave and Lydia nodded at the chair next to her. There was a look of definite gratitude when Allison came over and

sat down, getting out her books.

‘You weren’t at lunch.’ she said to Stiles, and her voice was tinged with mischief. ‘I couldn’t help but notice that you and Derek were having a little private al fresco thing.’

Stiles blushed and Lydia and her exchanged grins.

‘You two have only known each other for what, two days?’ he accused. ‘And you’re already in cahoots.’

‘Allison and I have an understanding.’ Lydia said and there was a definite undertone there that Stiles could pick up, even if he had no idea what it meant. He had realised that Lydia wasn’t one to answer questions she didn’t want to answer and he was pretty sure that, for all her dimpled prettiness, Allison was the same.

‘And that means, we can tease you as much as we want.’ Allison chimed in. ‘But for what it’s worth, Derek’s so hot. I can absolutely understand why you’re interested.’

‘Well, Scott thinks you’re amazing.’ Stiles replied and then frowned when she looked confused. ‘What, didn’t he spend the whole of lunch giving you puppy dog eyes?’

‘He wasn’t with us for lunch.’ Lydia told him.

‘He said he was going to sit with you guys.’ Stiles was stumped and then his heart sank. ‘Jesus, I hope he wasn’t with Theo and those assholes.’

‘Have you spoken to him about it?’ Allison asked, her voice full of sympathy. ‘I know what it’s like to get taken in by someone you think is somebody else and it’s really easy to convince yourself about them and their intentions.’ She looked at the desk, the corners of her mouth turning down. ‘It’s easy to get lost.’

Stiles was curious as to what exactly she meant.

‘I did sort of.’ he said. ‘My dad kind of got on his case. Laura told him about some of the shit they got up to with Erica and Isaac and he basically told Scott not to hang out with them anymore.’

‘Good call.’ Lydia pursed her lips in distaste. ‘What they did to Isaac was just cruel.’

‘What happened?’ Allison asked and Lydia shook her head.

‘Later.’ she replied and they all fell silent when Mr Fischer walked into the room and set down his pile of papers.

‘Trade routes!’ he boomed. ‘Raise your hands if you’re excited.’

Stiles grinned. Mr Fischer had an enormous beard, a Shakespearian way of speaking and a passion for bizarre historical facts. This was definitely going to be fun.

The class passed quickly and by the time the final bell rang, Stiles was ready to get out and to the shop. His concern for Scott still nagged at the back of his mind and he kept an eye out for him when they left class. Lydia and Allison said goodbye and went off together, their lowered voices swallowed up by the general sounds of school finishing.

Stiles walked towards the side exit of the school, seeing Jackson and Danny walking by with their gym bags. They waved at him, shit eating grins in force and Stiles waved back, feeling warm

inside.

He got to the parking lot and was astonished to find Scott standing at the jeep. He was supposed to be going straight home and would have caught the same bus the Hales usually did, but one look at his stricken face and Stiles was opening the passenger door and hustling him inside.

‘Dude.’ He got in and shut the door. ‘What happened?’

‘They’re crazy.’ Scott hissed, looking horrified. ‘They made me look at dead people!’ The last was hissed and Stiles knew Scott well enough to see just how shaken he was. He didn’t need to ask who it was that had gotten Scott so worked up either.

‘Tell me.’ he said and Scott slumped in his seat.

Theo told me that I needed to see something.’ He looked ashamed of himself and Stiles let him talk. ‘They took me down into the basement and Tracy gave me this file to read. She stole it from her dad’s office. He works for the D.A. and it was all about that girl they say Derek killed, the one who was his friend.’ He looked up, his mouth turned down and his dark eyes suspiciously shiny. ‘I saw what she looked like.’

Stiles was horrified.

‘That’s illegal.’ he told him. ‘She should absolutely not have access to Derek’s file, especially if he was a minor when he was being investigated.’

‘I don’t know where she got it from.’ Scott swallowed noisily. ‘That wasn’t the worst part though.’ He glanced at Stiles and shrunk in on himself. ‘They also had the file about the fire at Derek’s house. They had pictures of what the bodies looked like, you know, after.’

That made Stiles see red. He gripped the steering wheel, every inch of him screaming to go back into school and hunt them down and beat the shit out of all of them, Tracy included.

‘Fuck.’ he gritted out, angrier than he’d been for a long time. ‘They had the coroner’s report?’

‘I think so.’ Scott shuddered. ‘God, it was awful.’

‘If you think it’s awful, imagine how Derek feels.’ Stiles snapped. ‘Imagine knowing that they have pictures of his dead family and are dragging them out for shock value.’

‘I know.’ Scott rubbed both hands over his face. ‘I’m sorry, Stiles. I know what I said about him and it was so...’ He trailed off and looked at Stiles, his unhappiness written all over his face.

Stiles sighed and leaned his forehead on the steering wheel, fighting to get himself under control.

‘It’s not me you have to apologise to.’ he eventually said. ‘I mean, yeah, you’ve been an asshole and you believing them over me really fucking hurt.’ He raised his head and looked at him. ‘Maybe now you understand why I was pissed off.’

‘I do.’ Scott stuck a nail in his mouth, chewing nervously. ‘They’re seriously scary. I’m sorry I didn’t believe you.’

Their eyes met and Stiles eventually nodded.

‘Okay, here’s what we’re going to do.’ he said. ‘I’m dropping you off at the station. You’re going to tell dad what you saw and you’re not going to leave anything out. If Tracy is stealing shit from her dad that is supposed to be sealed, he needs to know about it.’

‘What if they find out though?’ Scott looked panicked. ‘They’re going to come after me.’

‘They’ll get suspended before they can get to you.’ Stiles said, starting the Jeep. ‘And even if they try anything, we’ll make sure they don’t do anything. Trust me, okay. There’s no way I’ll let anything happen and neither will Dad.’

‘Okay.’ Scott let out a shaky breath. ‘I’ll do it.’

Stiles tried to reassure him with a look but the pain that suddenly lanced through his head wiped it clean off his face. He gasped and his vision went blurry for a moment. It was worse than anything he’d felt before and he was vaguely aware of Scott calling his name and shaking his arm.

‘Stiles!’ He was also gasping, his face starting to go red and Stiles realised he was having an attack every bit as severe as his own.

‘Shit.’ He blinked to clear his eyes and grabbed for Scott’s backpack, finding his inhaler in the front pocket and shoving it at him. Scott took it gratefully and took his hits, breathing in and holding it. When he released it, his breathing came easier.

‘Thank you.’ he wheezed. ‘Dammit, that was close.’

Stiles burst out laughing. It was pitchy and close to hysterical but he felt like a dam had broken inside him and he fell back against his seat.

‘We’re a fucking mess.’ he declared and Scott snorted. He was back to his normal colour and gave Stiles a weak smack in the arm.

‘You’re worse.’ He grinned at Stiles. ‘I am though. Sorry. For being a dick.’

‘You should be.’ Stiles patted his arm. ‘But I forgive you.’

The drive to the station took a little under fifteen minutes, by which time Scott was fully recovered and now looking determined.

‘I’m taking them down.’ He sounded pissed and this made Stiles smile. Scott was like a puppy most of the time but he still had a temper, a little leftover legacy from Rafael. ‘I keep thinking about what if it had been pictures of your mom and it’s really making me angry.’

‘Atta boy.’ Stiles all but shoved him out the Jeep. ‘Now you go in there and tell Noah everything.’

‘You don’t want to come with me?’ Scott asked, looking hopeful and Stiles was torn. He looked at his backpack where the journal lurked and then sighed heavily.

‘Okay.’ he said. ‘But just for a little bit. I’ve got to be somewhere.’

-

Derek got to the shop half expecting Stiles to be there already. He’d caught his scent in the corridor and seen Stiles tearing out of the lot, clearly in a rush. To his surprise though, there was no sign of the Jeep when he got out the truck (Erica had dropped him off on the way to her own part time job at the tattoo shop where she manned the phones) and went inside.

‘Hi.’ Peter grinned at him. ‘Guess what I got today?’ He made a grand gesture at a set of books on the counter. ‘It’s both volumes of *Chiromance & Physionomie Par le Regard Des Membres de L’Homme*.’

Derek hung up his jacket and set his backpack down behind the counter.

‘Stiles is coming,’ he said by way of greeting, although he did stop to run admiring fingers over the leather cover of the top volume. ‘He’s started reading the journal. He knows about the magic and about us knowing each other.’

‘That was fast.’ Peter observed. ‘How is he taking it?’

‘Really well.’ Derek replied.

‘I know Laura wants us to wait until Friday to tell him but I think she’s worried for nothing.’ Peter said. ‘I think he’s going to jump right in with both feet.’

Derek shrugged and pushed up his sleeves, glancing towards the door. He wondered where Stiles was and what was keeping him.

-

‘Are you sure?’ Noah asked, his face creased up in anger. Stiles knew his dad well enough to see he was every bit as furious as he had been but trying to keep it under control.

‘Yes.’ Scott was still pale, but he’d calmed down once they were in the station. ‘I’m sure.’

‘Jesus.’ Noah sat back in his chair, blowing out an exasperated breath. ‘This goddamn town is turning out to be more of a mess than I thought.’

‘What do you mean?’ Stiles asked from the other chair.

‘I mean that I started going through the outstanding case files this morning and there’s some weird stuff happening around town.’ Noah nodded at his own pile of brown folders. ‘I’ve got two missing people, a dead deer turning up in the preserve with potentially occult signs carved into them and now it looks like I’ve got to make a call to the D.A. and tell them one of their own had a daughter that’s stealing sealed files records and showing them around. It’s been one hell of a day.’

‘Who’s missing?’ Stiles asked and Noah huffed and gave him his don’t you dare look. ‘Oh, come on. It’s not like I’m going to get into trouble over it. I’m kind of on probation still with you.’

Noah sighed, resigned, and Stiles leaned forward eagerly.

‘I’m telling you both because I want you to be alert, but this is not for public consumption.’ Noah was stern. ‘Two girls went missing last night. They were out on a date and neither of them made it home. Their parents didn’t really put two and two together until they got a call from the school to say the girls were missing from homeroom. We’re keeping it quiet until we are sure something’s happened to them.’

‘Damn.’ Stiles glanced at Scott, who looked just as disquieted. ‘Who are they?’

‘Caitlin McNamara and Emily Kincaid.’ Noah said. ‘You know them?’

‘No.’ Stiles shook his head. ‘Any idea where they went?’

‘Their parents are hoping they just skipped school.’ Noah replied. ‘Apparently there’s camping equipment missing from the McNamara’s garage so Laura and Tara are out in the preserve looking. Laura knows it pretty well.’

‘We won’t say anything.’ Stiles promised, his brain already flicking through the possibilities.

‘What do we do now?’

‘Nothing.’ Noah said. ‘I’m going to call David Whittemore later and have a very unpleasant conversation. Personally, I think all of those little delinquents need a lesson in both compassion and discretion but that will be up to them. Scott, I don’t think I need to repeat myself do I? Stay the hell away from all of them.’

‘I will.’ Scott looked thoroughly miserable. ‘Can I go home now?’

‘Sure.’ Noah said. ‘I’m actually heading out that way to see the Kincaids so I’ll drop you off. Stiles, you said you were going by the shop.’

‘I am.’ Stiles got up, pleased that he was getting to escape. It was already an hour and half later than he’d wanted. Derek had messaged a couple of times and he’d put him off with a quick *helping Scott, can’t talk now*. Derek hadn’t seemed put out by his absence but Stiles still felt pressed to get over there as quickly as he could.

He left Scott and Noah in Noah’s office, saying goodbye and all but running to his Jeep. Thankfully the drive was only a few blocks and he parked behind the shop and went inside, practically bouncing with everything that had happened.

He found Peter and Derek arguing on the mezzanine about where to shelve some books that they were waving around. Stiles grinned, all his earlier protectiveness and anger dissipating when he saw Derek smiling. He knew he’d done the right thing by going to his dad and he certainly wasn’t about to tell Derek about what Scott had seen. It wouldn’t help anything and he really didn’t feel like being the one to make Derek unhappy.

‘Hi.’ he called up and they both leaned over the balustrade to look at him. ‘What are you two doing?’

‘Trying to shelve books.’ Derek snorted. ‘But Peter is being difficult.’

‘You have your systems and I have mine.’ Peter retorted, coming down the stairs. ‘And last time I checked, this was still my shop.’

‘Whatever.’ Derek muttered, following him down. Stiles watched them, delighted at how they glared at each other, his heart giving a little thump when Derek gave him that half smile he was already addicted to.

‘So.’ Peter was back behind the counter. ‘I hear you’ve been doing some bedtime reading.’ He had his back to them but Stiles could hear he was also smiling.

‘Derek thinks I’m magic.’ he said and Peter laughed out loud.

‘In more ways than one.’ he remarked and Derek huffed and stomped past him into the back. ‘Make us some tea while you’re in there.’

Derek said something Stiles couldn’t make out but it had Peter chuckling again.

‘So you think you’re magic.’ he said to Stiles, his eyes twinkling. ‘I think that you know it’s more than that.’

‘Derek told me about the dreams he’s been having.’ Stile said. ‘I’ve been having them too. I dreamed about my grandmother last night.’

‘Hmmm.’ Peter came back around and directed him to the table in the corner. ‘That sounds like something she’d do. She was very connected to this town and that house you’re living in.’

‘What about the Nemeton?’ Stiles asked and Peter made a rude noise.

‘That damn tree.’ He sat down and steepled his fingers, elbows on the table. ‘You know it was planted by the Hales when we first moved here.’

‘It’s also magic?’ Stiles asked and he nodded.

‘Very much so.’ he replied. ‘Tell me Stiles, what do you know about telluric currents?’

‘Nothing major.’ Stiles shrugged. ‘They’re electric currents that move underground. It’s what scientists think animals use to navigate.’

‘Yes and no.’ Peter watched him carefully. ‘They can also be indicative of magic. The strongest ones flow towards each other, meeting at a central point that can be tapped into and provide a source of great power. The Nemeton sits directly over one such point, here in Beacon Hills.’

‘Cool.’ Stiles was wide eyed. ‘So my grandmother...’

‘She was connected to it for a very long time.’ Peter said. ‘Until it was cut down.’

‘Cut down?’ Stiles was immediately intrigued. ‘Why?’

‘It’s a long story.’ For the first time, Peter’s face showed something close to pain. ‘But the long and the short of it is that it was cut down and things haven’t been quite the same since then.’

‘Well, who cut it down?’ Stiles persisted. ‘If it was in the preserve, surely it must have been protected.’

Peter was silent for a while and then gave Stiles a very direct look.

‘You know the origin of the Nemeton, don’t you?’ he asked and Stiles nodded.

‘I looked it up. It comes from the Druids and their sacred groves.’

‘They chose those places precisely because of the abundance of natural magic.’ Peter explained. ‘Druids are good at manipulating it but they can’t produce it themselves. You, on the other hand, are very special. You’re what we call a Spark.’

‘A what now?’ Stiles asked and then got distracted by the sight of Derek coming out with the tea, balancing the tray with its cargo of delicate china effortlessly. He set it down and took the third seat and Peter started to pour it out.

‘A Spark.’ he repeated. ‘Your grandmother and mother were both witches. They had magical abilities far beyond that of an ordinary druid, but nowhere near as strong as I suspect yours are. Sparks are the living embodiment of magic.’ He handed over a cup and saucer and Stiles took it, goggling at him.

‘I am Merlin.’ he breathed and Peter made an amused noise.

‘Merlin was undoubtedly a Spark.’ he said. ‘As have been other figures of magic and mystery, although you are rare. I only personally know one other.’

‘Erin?’ Derek asked, taking his own tea and Peter nodded. Stiles wondered who she was and where

she was, but Peter didn't volunteer any further details.

'Okay so one thing I don't understand.' he said. 'If my mom was a witch, why did she never tell me? Especially if she knew that I was magic too. Why didn't she tell my dad? And how do we all know each other? I'm having all these flashes and dreams and Derek says they're memories and none of it makes sense.'

'If it's any consolation, we're still trying to figure it all out ourselves.' Peter said. 'All I can ask is that you're patient. I can give you everything I know but as for the things we're still trying to find out, you'll have to wait until we know more. I can tell you that Claudia never told your father about her magic or yours so you may wish to wait on doing that.'

'Cryptic much?' Stiles gave him a sceptical look. 'Okay. It's not like I have a choice. And I'm not sure announcing to my dad that I'm this Spark thing would be a good idea right now. He's got his hands full with the new job and the missing people and the weird deer killings right now.'

The impact of his words was surprising. Both Derek and Peter looked up abruptly from where they were sipping their tea, cups held in mid air while they looked at him and then each other and then back to him.

'Dead deer?' Peter asked, his focus now like a laser beam.

'Yeah, my dad said it had some weird symbol carved into it.' Stiles replied and then moved back in the face of the truly odd noise both he and Derek made.

'Shit.' Derek's voice seemed to have dropped a whole octave and his eyes were doing that bizarre flickering thing again. 'That's not good news.'

'Hey, don't shoot the messenger.' Stiles said and then clapped both hands over his mouth. 'Goddammit.' It came out muffled. 'I wasn't supposed to say anything.'

'Has Laura told you anything?' Derek demanded without acknowledging what he'd said. Stiles was about to answer when he realised he was asking Peter.

'No, but she wouldn't until she was sure.' Peter replied and he sounded, for lack of a better word, like he was worried about something pretty serious.

'My dad said she's out looking for them.' Stiles said, hoping to allay whatever worry it was. 'Do you know who I'm talking about?' He looked at Derek. 'They're juniors but I didn't recognise their names.'

Again there was that exchange of looks and both Peter and Derek's expressions smoothed out.

'No.' Derek said. 'I don't know who you're talking about.'

'So you weren't...' Stiles narrowed his eyes at them. 'Seriously? You're more concerned about some dead deer?'

'Trust me.' Peter was uncharacteristically serious. 'If you were us, you would be too.'

'How can I be when you won't tell me what exactly is going on?' Stiles countered.

'Not yet.' Peter replied. 'Now, let's talk about that journal of yours.'

Laura stood at the crest of the ridge, her head tilted back as she scented the air. Tara was still down with Caitlin's car, which they'd discovered on one of the service lanes that lead deep into the preserve. It was empty of the equipment that Caitlin's father conformed had been taken from their garage and Laura had followed tracks from the road in towards the lake. The discovery of the dead deer scratched at the back of her mind. The spiral carved into its side had been a symbol had been a warning, not that she had told Noah that. If the alpha was leaving threatening messages, it might have decided that two teenage girls would make a fine example of what it could do.

She picked up the telltale scent of woodfire and followed it down the slope. There were signs of people passing that way, disturbances in the soil and vegetation that marked the trail of the humans that had come through as clearly as if she was seeing a neon sign. Their scents lingered too, soft and feminine and faint enough to tell her they were at least twelve hours old. Derek would have been able to pinpoint the time better but Laura's nose was good enough for her to track them.

The campsite wasn't too far from the car, about three hundred feet in and close to the lakeshore. There was a small two man tent, a fire that had long burned out and various signs of panic. Inside the tent were scattered candles and a string of fairy lights that had been torn down leaving holes in the top of the tent. There were two sleeping bags and the lingering scent of pheromones told Laura exactly what the two girls had been doing when whatever happened had happened. She was a little confused though. Apart from the two scents, there were no signs of foul play or anyone else there.

She retreated from the tent and noticed the way the ground was disturbed, leading back into the trees. It looked like one of the girls had taken off running and that piqued Laura's interest. It could be a possible case of domestic crime, although that seemed unlikely. The girls' parents had confirmed that they had a solid and loving relationship and she had heard their hearts beat steady as they told her.

What made things even stranger was the fact that a second set of tracks led in a completely different direction. Laura debated for a second then decided to follow the first set. The person who'd made them had been clearly panicked, running blindly through the trees for about a hundred feet when suddenly the tracks vanished as if by magic. One second the girl had been running frantically away from whatever had spooked her and the next she was just gone. There was no scent trail either, nothing but the smells of the preserve. This was definitely not the work of a feral alpha. There would have been far more blood and body parts if it had been.

Laura growled, unsettled by what she'd found. She went back to the tent and followed the second set of footprints and found the same thing. Now she was convinced that something out of the ordinary had happened and she took out her phone, knowing that she needed to put the pack on alert before she called it in.

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The telephone rang with an old fashioned trilling noise and Peter went to answer it, leaving Derek and Stiles poring over the journal.

'I should learn Polish properly.' Stiles grumbled. 'This is killing me.'

'Yeah.' Derek was growing at the page they were on. 'I thought I could help, but you probably know way more than me.'

'I can't believe you speak Russian.' Stiles grinned. 'That's awesome.'

'Only way to read Dostoyevsky.' Derek replied and studied the diagram on the page. 'What's that?'

'I looked it up last night.' Stiles said. 'I think it's a casting circle.'

'It looks like a transmutation circle.' Derek turned the journal around to get a better look. He was close enough that Stiles could discreetly sniff him and get a little light headed at how good he smelled.

'You know Fullmetal Alchemist?' he asked, barely able to contain his glee.

'Sure.' Derek looked up and gave him an easy smile. 'Who's your favourite?'

'The Elrics.' Stiles grinned. 'But I bet you like Roy, right? He's all brooding and dark and mysterious.'

'Actually, Riza's my favourite.' Derek replied with a smirk. 'And you think I'm brooding and mysterious?'

'I said Roy not you, asshole.' Stiles shoved him playfully. 'Not everything is about you.'

'I think you're lying.' Derek was smiling wide enough that his dimples were showing. 'I think everything is about me.'

Stiles' breath caught when their eyes met. The look Derek was giving him was intense and he could feel how hard his heart was pounding in anticipation. Derek seemed to pick up on how he was feeling and Stiles felt a tug of heat in his chest when Derek's pupils visibly dilated against the pale green of his irises. He desperately hoped that Derek was going to kiss him but just as he started to lean in, Peter set the receiver down with a bang and they both startled, Derek pulling back from him and affecting a casual look while Stiles tried to get his breathing under control.

The look on Peter's face helped that along pretty quickly.

'That was Laura.' he said. 'She said to tell both of you the preserve is out of bounds until further notice.'

'Why?' Derek looked equal parts concerned and pissed. 'What did she find?'

'The girls were out there camping.' Peter said. 'But all she found was their tent. It looks like something scared them and they both took off running into the preserve until their tracks disappeared.'

'Disappeared.' Stiles frowned. 'That's weird as fuck.'

'Didn't she ...' Derek started and then cut himself off. 'Couldn't she tell if they had been taken by someone?' He sounded like he was trying not to say something and Stiles gave him a suspicious look.

'No, there was no sign of anyone else.' Peter replied. 'Which means something strange went on.' His eyes flicked to Stiles and he caught on immediately.

'Something magic?' he asked and Peter shrugged.

'Possibly.' he said, coming to sit down again. 'So until we figure out what it might be, no wandering around and both of you stay far away from the Nemeton. That last we need is something happening to you Stiles, when we're still trying to figure out what we're going to do with you.'

'You said the headaches and the losing time was because I wasn't using my magic and it was

getting out of control.’ Stiles tapped the page of the journal with his fingers. ‘Teaching me will help that, right?’

‘It will.’ Peter nodded. ‘But I’m not a witch. It’s going to be slow going.’

‘We might have to speed things up.’ Stiles looked between them. ‘I mean if there’s something weird going on.’

‘Jesus.’ Derek muttered. ‘Why can’t things just stay quiet?’

‘It’s Beacon Hills, Derek.’ Peter told him. ‘What else do you expect?’

-

Scott hated being home alone.

He sulked around the house for a while, bored and more than a little freaked out. It was a little creepy, the way it creaked and made spooky noises and he eventually retreated to the living room to watch TV and lie on the couch. Stiles wasn’t due home for a while, his Mom was still at the hospital and wouldn’t be back until eight and Noah was working a double shift. He’d called and apparently they’d found something in the preserve which would have to be processed so Scott knew he’d be alone for a while.

He sighed and berated himself for not listening to Stiles. If he’d gone to sit with the others as Stiles had suggested, he might have been able to get Allison’s number and be texting her instead of jumping at his own shadow. His asthma attack earlier hadn’t helped and he burrowed deeper into the couch and turned the volume up, hoping to make the house seem less unsettling.

Unfortunately that also meant he didn’t hear the distant approach of the car or the people that got out of it and started creeping to the house.

-

‘Stiles why don’t you give Derek a ride home. In fact, if you’re going to be all by yourself, why don’t I give you boys some pizza money and you can make an evening of it.’ Peter suggested, just to see his nephew go pink in the ears. It was always terribly gratifying to embarrass Derek because the results were so noticeable. And it wasn’t like he hadn’t noticed their little moment while he was talking to Laura on the phone. This would give Derek a chance to be alone with Stiles and hopefully make a move on him. It wasn’t hard to see how smitten Stiles was, or to smell the hopeful sweetness in his scent every time he looked at Derek.

‘I can pay for our pizza. That’s if you want me to come over.’ Derek muttered, still blushing. He glanced at Stiles, who was nodding so frantically his head looked like it was in danger of falling off.

‘Hell yeah.’ He was beaming. ‘I’ve got FMA on blu-ray. We can watch it, if you want.’ His smile faltered a bit. ‘Scott’s there though, so he might be a little weird.’

‘I don’t mind.’ Derek was now doing that shifting thing he did when he was extremely pleased. Peter rolled his eyes at them. It was excruciating watching them and he waved them off before he gave into his urge to mash their faces together.

‘Go on.’ he ordered. ‘Go have fun and eat questionable food and I’ll come get you later.’ He fixed Derek with a stern look. ‘Do not walk home by yourself.’

'Fine, whatever.' Derek was too busy batting his eyelashes at Stiles to even look that annoyed. They headed off towards Stiles' Jeep and Peter waited until they'd pulled off before he called Laura. She answered but didn't speak and he heard her walking, obviously to get out of earshot, before she finally said anything.

'Was it the alpha?' he asked and she snorted angrily.

'No.' She was pacing, he could hear the crunch of leaves under her boots. 'Definitely not. There's no scents, no territorial marking, nothing. And no sign of either girl. Forensics are here but they're not going to get anything. This whole place is clean.'

'I've sent Derek home with Stiles.' Peter told her. 'Scott's there alone and I think we'd all feel better if he was there to keep an eye out.'

'Good idea.' Laura said. 'I'm going to be out here all night so I can keep watch here. They're going to organise a search party in the morning.'

'I could have a look.' Peter offered. 'Maybe check the territory line?'

'No.' Laura growled, clearly agitated. 'The last thing we need is you getting into something. You need to be at home. Cora's already there with Isaac, Boyd and Erica. Lydia's over at Jackson's. She's taken the Argent girl with her for a movie night and sleepover so her and Danny are both safe with them.'

'The Argent girl?' Peter kept his cool. 'Lydia's making friends with her now?'

'I think it's a good idea.' Laura was nonplussed. 'She's a hunter but she seems to have made all the right overtures and Lydia likes her. She's going to gently try and extract all she can about her and her father while Allison's there with them.'

'Interesting.' Peter's mind started calculating. He could probably spare at least a couple of hours before Laura checked up on him again. That would give him all the time he needed. 'All right then, if I'm not needed I'll head out.'

'Be careful.' Laura told him. 'Just because you're older, doesn't mean I can't worry about you.'

'Yes Alpha.' Peter smiled. 'I promise I won't do anything stupid.'

Laura's growl made him grin and he hung up on her before she could get the last word in. He walked to his car, making a quick check on his phone. Luckily, his target believed in correct registration and the local business directory had his new address listed. Then again, hiding in plain sight was a hunter speciality.

Peter pulled out into traffic with a grin. He couldn't wait to see the look on Chris' face when he opened the door to him.

Chapter 11

Then house was bland suburban pretty and Peter snorted and got out his car. He regarded the building for a few moments, focusing on the sounds inside. There was only one heartbeat and it was very familiar, the cadence a little quicker than it had been when Chris was younger but as individual as his scent. Peter knew it as well as he knew the heartbeats of his pack, and could pick it out of a room full of people if he needed to.

He was hit by a flood of emotion that he'd spent the last two and a half decades trying to wring out of himself but knowing that all that separated him from the person he knew was his mate was a few walls had him fighting for control in a way he hadn't since the fire.

He was standing there debating just what to do when the front door opened and a tall rangy figure came out onto the porch. Even in the dark, Peter could make out the sharp lines of Chris' face, honed by the years and matching the silver tinge to his light blond hair that hadn't been there the last time Peter had seen him. Their eyes met and Peter inhaled deeply, Chris's smoke and ash scent drifting down to him and making his breathing pick up speed.

Chris didn't move for a long time, silent as he looked at Peter, his eyes roving from head to foot until he finally sighed and turned around.

'Come in, if you're coming in then.' he said and went inside. Peter hesitated. If he walked through that door he'd be opening up a can of worms that could well and truly spell disaster.

Then again he did like a bit of drama so he followed, closing the front door behind him.

-

Stiles turned into the drive to his house and pondered what his next move should be. There were four stuffed crust pepperoni pizzas on the back seat along with a whole bag of cheese breadsticks and wings. There was enough food for about eight people, but Stiles wasn't complaining. Derek had insisted on paying for all of it and consciously avoided garlic bread so Stiles was definitely calling it a date, even if he'd have to share it with Scott.

He parked under the huge tree at the front and got out, leaving back in to grab his backpack and stacking the pizzas with the bags with the breadsticks and wings on top. He balanced them as he edged the door shut with his hip and then stopped dead when he saw Derek striding past the Jeep towards the house, his head lifted and his face concerned.

'Hey.' He shrugged his backpack onto his shoulder, juggling the bags and pizzas as he jogged to catch up. 'A little help here.'

'Something's wrong.' Derek's face was doing a scarily intense thing. He looked back towards the road. 'Did you recognise that car?'

'What car?' Stiles hadn't really been paying attention, too buoyed along on happiness and hormones.

'Go inside.' Derek directed, already on the move back towards the road. 'I'm going to check it out. Find Scott and wait for me.'

'Um, okay?' Stiles was horribly confused by Derek's change in mood but he did as he asked, taking the front steps in one bound and then regretting it when he nearly dropped everything in

surprise because the front door was standing open. He hadn't really noticed because the evening was setting in and the shadows under the porch was deep. It was something that no-one in their house did, both him and Scott well educated in home safety. A prickle ran down his spine and Stiles took the first step inside cautiously.

'Scott?' He moved slowly, a sick feeling building inside him. He stopped at the doorway to the living room and saw that it was empty, the lights out and the TV off. There was no sign of Scott and when he flicked the light switch, nothing happened.

'Stiles!' It was Derek and he turned to see him come running in. 'Did you find him?'

'No.' Stiles set all the food down on the coffee table and dug out his phone. 'The lights are all off.'

'Theo.' Derek's voice was rough and growly. 'He was here. Him and those shitheads he hangs out with.'

'How do you...?' Stiles frowned when he heard Scott's ringtone close at hand. A quick search located it down the side of the couch and there was a sick lurch in his stomach. 'Fuck.'

'Theo's car is parked on the side of the road.' Derek told him. 'They obviously wanted to sneak up on him.'

'Shit.' Stiles started to panic. 'Okay, there's something I have to tell you.'

'What?' Derek's pale eyes gleamed eerily in the dark. He was turning this way and that, his nostrils doing their odd flaring thing. 'They were in here and they were obviously the ones that tripped the power. Your house has probably got an exterior fusebox. The question is why.'

'That's the thing.' Stiles could only desperately hope he was wrong. 'Today they got Scott by himself and showed him some stuff that really freaked him out. So much so that he went to my dad and he's pretty much agreed to never go near them again.'

Derek looked at him steadily, his mouth twisting.

'It had to do with me, didn't it?' he asked and the resignation in his face made Stiles furious.

'Tracy's got your personal files.' he said. 'I'm assuming that there was an investigation and your records were sealed because you were a minor.'

Derek looked confused for a moment and then huffed.

'It was about Paige.' he said. 'It's a long story.'

'You don't owe me any explanations.' Stiles wrung his hands, his fear building. He was scared for Scott, knowing what they'd done earlier. 'We told my dad about it. Tracy didn't just have that file, she had the coroner's reports for your family as well.'

'What?' Derek's voice got even softer, but it was only because Stiles had a handle on him that he knew it meant Derek was even angrier.

'I'm sorry I didn't tell you.' He stepped forward, his hand going to Derek's arm. 'I didn't want to upset you because I thought we'd handled it. Obviously they got wind of that somehow and came here to scare Scott or get revenge, I really don't know but if they've hurt him I'll...' He had to break off, the feeling of dread finally overwhelming him. He started to pant, the familiar feeling of a panic attack starting in until suddenly his upper arms were being gripped by too large warm

hands and it snapped him out long enough for him to look up into Derek's eyes.

At first, Stiles thought he must be hallucinating. It had happened before and he blinked, hypnotised by the way Derek's eyes glowed a brilliant gold that looked like it was being backlit.

'Dude.' It came out breathless. 'What's going on with your eyes.'

'It just so happens, I need to tell you something too.' Derek said and when he spoke, Stiles caught a glimpse of teeth that were too long and too sharp to be human.

'What the fuck...' He tried to wriggle out of Derek's grip only to see him turn his head so sharply it was almost comic. Stiles had the ridiculous urge to yell 'Squirrel!' at him.

'Fuck.' Derek growled and it was an actual growl, not unlike that of an angry dog. 'We have to go find him.'

'Who? Scott?' Stiles snapped back to himself in what felt like a second. Nothing focused him like needing to help Scott when he got into trouble and the look on Derek's face (even if that face was doing very weird things) was enough to have him running after him, through the kitchen and out the back door, also left standing open, and through the yard. He gaped as Derek cleared the fence like an Olympic hurdler, his own attempt at getting over it far less graceful before he took off after him into the trees and the growing darkness.

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Scott ran on, his feet stumbling on the uneven ground and his breathing coming in short jerky pants that made his chest ache. He wasn't unfit but the fear that had him not looking back even for a second. He'd stopped to yell for help but that had just brought him to their attention and he was so far into the preserve now that he knew he had no hope of attracting anyone that could save him.

He hadn't expected the lights to go out or the front door to burst open, scaring the bejesus out of him. He certainly hadn't expected Matt and Donovan to run in, yelling blue murder and chasing him around the living room. Scott had managed to avoid them and make it into the kitchen and out the back door, narrowly escaping Theo and Tracy as they came around the side of the house. He wasn't stupid or slow and getting over the fence had bought him a few precious minutes, but Scott knew he was screwed.

All he could hope for was that Stiles came home and figured out what had happened and came to save his ass.

-

'Derek!' Stiles yelled, battling to keep up with him, especially in the dark. Derek was running like his ass was on fire, navigating the dark preserve effortlessly. Stiles had a hysterical thought that it was because he obviously had his own built in headlamps and ran on, sticking as close as he could.

They were headed in the direction of the lake, he was pretty sure of that. He couldn't hear much over the pounding of blood in his ears and his feet thudding on the ground but Derek slowed to listen and he barrelled right into him.

'They're down there.' Derek righted him, his eyes still glowing. 'Four of them on one. Cowards!'

'I think we already ascertained that.' Stiles jabbed a finger in his face. 'Seriously, when we find Scott and get back, you are so telling me what's up with those.'

Derek wasn't looking at him again. Instead he had his head tipped up, nose in the air and drawing in deep breaths. When he stopped, his entire face shifted and Stiles gasped and flew back, arms pinwheeling as he tried to find his balance.

'Holy fuck!' He stared and stared, not able to even comprehend what he was seeing. 'You've got to be shitting me!'

'Jesus.' It was Derek who now sounded panicked. 'This is so fucking bad.'

'What?' Stiles stopped long enough to crowd closer to him. 'Derek?'

'You need to run.' Derek looked at him, the heavy brow ridge and bizarre lack of eyebrows not even close to disguising his fear. 'Run and don't fucking stop until you get back to the house. I'll lead it off.'

'Lead what off?!' Stiles yelled, waving his arms but all Derek did was shove him in the direction they'd come from.

'Go now!' he bellowed and then something came through the trees that was huge and black and had glowing red eyes that burned like the fires of hell and Stiles screamed and started running.

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Scott skidded to a stop, his eyes wide as he started wheezing frantically as it all got too much.

He braced his hands on his knees, the dreaded tightness in his chest getting worse with every passing second until he could barely breathe. His vision started swimming and he toppled over, clutching at his pockets and then starting to cry in terror when they came up empty. He knew without his inhaler he was in serious trouble and there was nobody there to save him.

He blinked away tears to see four shadows coming to stand over him. He could only just make out Tracy's voice, and she sounded every bit as scared as he was.

'He's having an attack.' She glared at Theo. 'We need to help him.'

'Fuck that noise.' Theo snapped. 'This fucker got you into serious shit today or did you forget that?'

'She's right.' Matt was backing away. 'We need to get help.'

'We're in the middle of the fucking preserve, asshole.' Donovan shoved him. 'There's nobody around for miles. I say we leave him, let him fucking die.'

'Jesus, Don.' Tracy was starting to look terrified. 'We'll get caught!'

'No we won't.' Theo crouched down by Scott, looking at him impassively. 'I agree with Donovan. Let the little fucker suffocate.' He stood up. 'It fixes our problems and sends a message.'

He moved past Scott and then froze. Scott wasn't so busy nearly dying from lack of oxygen that he couldn't hear the deep roar somewhere off in the dark. It sounded like the T-Rex from Jurassic Park, only about a thousand times meaner and real enough that he whimpered.

'What the fuck was that?' Even Donovan was spooked.

'I don't know.' Theo moved back so they were all clustered together. 'I think we need to get the fuck out of here though.'

They bolted and Scott was left alone. His breathing was now so shallow he could hardly hear himself wheeze, his throat closing up and his sight blurring until he could barely make out the two glowing red spots just above him. A huge clawed hand came down on his shoulder and drops of hot spittle fell onto his face.

‘Yessss.’ the nightmarish thing hissed above him in a guttural voice. ‘You’ll do nicely.’

Something sharp pierced his side and Scott tried to scream but it was too late and he finally blacked out, the pain in his side burning worse than any pain he’d ever felt.

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Derek was horribly confused but also terrified out of his wits. He’d run like hell, his only thought to try and get the alpha away from Stiles and close enough to his house that he could howl for backup. The alpha had obliged by following him, roaring in anger as Derek wound through the trees and dropped to all fours, faster that way as he tore through the preserve. Stiles wouldn’t warrant its attention, too small and human to be a threat but Derek was a lone wolf on enemy territory and the alpha would happily kill him if it could.

It took a while to realise that he was not being followed anymore and he’d slowed and then stopped completely, horrified at the thought that the alpha had gone after Stiles. It did give him a chance to throw back his head and howl for help, the sound cutting through the night. It would call his pack to him but also hopefully get the alpha chasing him again and he started running in the direction of his house.

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Noah stopped what he was doing and looked over at Laura. She was at the edge of the campsite, now cordoned off and being processed as thoroughly as possible, her entire body tense as the most unholy sound rent the air.

‘What the hell was that?’ Noah went over to her. ‘Laura?’

‘I have to go.’ Laura turned to him, her face desperate. ‘I’ll explain later.’

‘I..what?’ Noah started but she was gone, tearing off into the trees faster than he’d ever seen a person move. A moment later there was another sound, this one drawn out and beseeching.

‘Okay.’ Noah frowned. ‘What happened to there being no wolves in California?’

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Stiles had no idea which way he was running. All he knew was that one second he was doing his best impression of Usain Bolt and the next he was tripping over something and sprawling on the ground, all his exposed skin scraped to hell.

‘Fuck, fuck, fuck...’ He rolled and sat up, wincing at the pain in his already injured hands. Then he fell silent, his pain forgotten when he saw what he’d fallen over. He scrambled over, nearly frantic as he ran his hands over Scott’s chest. His t-shirt was shredded and his skin was tacky with what Stiles could only assume was a massive amount of blood.

‘No, no, no...’ he whined, shaking Scott as hard as he could. ‘No, fuck, Scott please wake up.’

Scott groaned and the relief that engulfed Stiles was enough to knock all the air out of him. He grabbed Scott’s shoulder and hauled him up, crushing him in his need to hold him close.

‘You’re okay.’ He could feel how Scott was shaking. ‘What the fuck happened to you?’

‘There was something.’ Scott wheezed and Stiles eased him back down. ‘I don’t know what it was. It fucking bit me.’

So that was where the blood was from. Stiles dug out his phone and used the flashlight to have a look and then wished he hadn’t.

Scott had been mauled. His skin under the remains of his shirt was bloody, a set of deep teeth marks in his side. The holes were so deep they looked black and the bleeding was profuse. Stiles ripped off his flannel, bundling it up and pressing it to the bite. It wasn’t Scott’s only wound either. His opposite shoulder had four deep gouges in it, like whatever had bitten him had held onto him to make sure he couldn’t escape. It wasn’t bleeding as badly as the bite, but it was still horrifying to look at and Stiles had to bite back a wave of nausea.

He looked around him, hoping like hell that whatever had attacked Scott wasn’t coming back for seconds.

‘Can you get up?’ he asked and Scott whined and made an effort to move. Stiles grabbed him under the arms and managed to get him on his feet. Scott was shaking and wavering so Stiles got under his arm to take his weight and pulled him in close.

‘Stiles.’ Scott wheezed. ‘Hurts.’

‘I know, buddy. We’re going to get you back to the house and fix you up, okay?’ Stiles started dragging him with him, then shrieked when someone melted right out of the shadows, their eyes lit up gold.

‘Goddammit!’ He was panting with effort and fright. ‘Derek?’

‘No.’ The shadow came closer and the size of the shoulders and depth of the voice identified it as Boyd. His eyes faded back to black when he saw Stiles and Scott. ‘Shit, what happened?’

‘He’s been attacked.’ Stiles said and Boyd instantly came over and took Scott from him, picking him up as easily as if he weighed nothing. ‘But you know that don’t you?’

‘Where’s Derek?’ Boyd asked, ignoring his question.

‘He took off, said something about leading it away.’ Stiles told him, jogging to keep up. ‘Holy shit, are you all like that?’

‘Boyd!’ Erica came crashing through the trees and she looked the same way Derek had with the same glowing eyes and fangs. Her brow was thickened and the tips of two pointed ears peeked out from her tumbled curls and Stiles stared at her openly, his brain working furiously to connect all the dots.

Once he looked at everything, it all made complete sense of course.

‘Werewolves?’ He waved his hands around wildly as Erica’s face changed back to her normal, human appearance. ‘Fucking werewolves?’

‘Shit.’ Erica growled at Boyd. ‘You told him?’

‘He didn’t need to!’ Stiles yelled, still flailing. ‘Why the fuck didn’t I realise it sooner?’

'Yeah, yeah, you can kick yourself later.' Erica told him. 'What happened to Scott?'

'The alpha.' Boyd rumbled. 'You heard it. Derek's still out there though.'

'We need to get him home.' Stiles persisted. 'He's bleeding and he's not breathing right. We need to find his inhaler.'

'You mean this.' It was Isaac. He looked perfectly normal but the silent way he moved with almost predatorial grace left Stiles in no doubt he was the same as them. He held up the inhaler and Stiles grabbed it. He was about to administer it when Boyd shook his head.

'His breathing is getting better.' he said. 'He doesn't need it.'

'I'll be the judge of that.' Stiles snapped, worry making him irritable.

'No, Boyd's right.' Erica caught his arm. 'He's healing.'

'Fuck.' Isaac made a face. 'He's turning?'

'Looks like.' Boyd picked up the pace. 'Let's get the fuck out of here.' He turned and started jogging and for the second time Stiles was scurrying to keep up.

'Where's Cora?' Erica asked Isaac.

'She caught Derek's scent.' Isaac replied, then froze. They had all stopped and Stiles watched how they tilted their heads and it made sense, all the little mannerisms that he could now identify as canine rather than human.

There was a roar somewhere off to their left, long and drawn out. It was followed by another sound, more of a howl and pained, and Boyd immediately changed direction and started running, Erica and Isaac practically lifting Stiles off the ground, one hand under each elbow as they chivvied him along.

'What the fuck?' he protested and Erica growled at him, her eyes burning gold again.

'Trust me.' she said. 'You don't want to know.'

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Derek hit the tree and crashed to the ground. He lay there, all the air knocked out of him, and watched as the two alphas faced off. Cora was next to him in an instant, beta shifted and hauling him to his feet. They crouched together behind the tree he'd hit and watched.

The feral alpha was a monstrosity. She, and it was definitely female judging by her scent, wasn't the magnificent sleek creature their sister shifted into. Instead she was hunched and twisted, her grey wrinkled skin bare of fur and her face stuck halfway between human and wolf. She was also weaker, falling back in the face of Laura's attack. Unlike the other alpha, she was perfection to look at. Her pelt was midnight black and glossy, her huge body rippling with muscle and long arms tipped in razor sharp obsidian claws. She swiped at the feral alpha, bowling her over and ripping deep gashes in her side. The feral alpha yelped and snapped but she was no match and on Laura's next pass, she ducked and bolted, taking off into the darkness.

Laura fell back to all fours, panting with exertion. Her head swung in their direction and they came out of hiding, going to her and scenting her vigorously to let her know they were okay. Laura rumbled deep in her chest and nuzzled them in turn before shifting back in a blur of receding fur

and cracking bones.

‘Jesus.’ She glanced in the direction the alpha had run. ‘That was close.’

‘You got here fast.’ Derek cracked his neck and shook off the last of the pain from his splintered ribs. They were knitting together quickly and he pressed a hand to his side to make sure they had snapped back into place properly.

‘I was at the lake.’ Laura replied. She huffed in annoyance. ‘I’m going to have to explain why I took off from an active crime scene.’

‘Not like that.’ Cora gave her naked body a pointed look. ‘I’m sure the Sheriff doesn’t want to know you that well.’

Laura made a face and Derek had to suppress a smile. She’d obviously discarded her clothing as she’d run to his aid and would now need to retrace her steps and collect everything.

‘She won’t be back.’ Her eyes were still red and Derek could smell the aggression on her. ‘Not tonight.’

‘She’s been made wrong.’ Cora remarked, still sticking closer to her. ‘She stinks.’

Derek agreed. The alpha smelled of corruption, like rotting meat and old blood.

‘She’s not what Chris Argent said she is, that’s for damn sure.’ Laura growled. ‘She doesn’t fight like a wolf. That’s a recently turned human who got lucky and killed the alpha that bit her.’

‘A hunter maybe?’ Cora asked and Derek shivered at the thought.

‘I’m going to find out.’ Laura started walking and they fell into step with her. ‘First I have to deal with Noah.’ She looked at Derek. ‘Where’s Stiles?’

‘I sent him back to the house.’ Derek told her. ‘We were looking for Scott. Theo and the rest of them cornered him at the house and he ran into the preserve. The alpha was chasing me so I hope he found them and got them away.’

‘Go after him.’ Laura instructed. ‘And stay with them tonight. I’ll handle Noah.’

She loped off and Derek blew out a deep breath. He didn’t know how he knew that Stiles was safe, but he could feel it.

‘Come on.’ Cora tugged on his sleeve. ‘Let’s go find them.’

It didn’t take long to catch up and the first thing Derek caught was the smell of blood, although he knew it wasn’t Stiles’. He could hear him complaining though and smiled as they ran through the trees and found him with the others, being half carried along by Erica and Isaac. Boyd was carrying Scott bridal style and he was the source of the blood.

‘Derek!’ Stiles went limp and the relief rolled off him in waves when he saw them. ‘You’re okay.’

‘Yeah.’ He wasn’t prepared for the hug and had to stagger back a bit under the weight of Stiles’ surprisingly sturdy body. His instincts kicked in before his brain and he buried his face in Stiles’ neck and nuzzled behind his ear, taking deep lungfuls of his scent and wrapping his arms tightly around him.

He heard quiet snickers and then realised what he was doing. Stiles didn’t seem to mind though. In

fact, his scent was syrupy sweet and he made a soft noise and wriggled closer.

‘Scenting.’ he muttered in Derek’s ear. ‘Well, that makes sense.’

Derek looked over his shoulder at Boyd.

‘Scott’s been bit.’ he said. ‘He’s turning.’

‘Fuck.’ Cora wrinkled her nose. ‘The alpha?’

‘Obviously.’ Erica growled. ‘She also ripped him up pretty badly.’

‘That’ll fix itself.’ Derek pulled back and saw how Stiles was looking at him. ‘Um. Surprise?’

‘Asshole. You’re all werewolves.’ His voice was fond. ‘I can’t believe it.’

‘Well, you’re magic.’ Cora grinned. ‘So why not werewolves?’

‘I guess.’ Stiles said, still standing close to Derek. He was overwhelmingly relieved that Stiles didn’t seem to be at all repelled by the idea.

‘Laura wants us to get you home and make sure you’re safe.’ he said to him. ‘You and Scott. Did you find the others?’

‘No.’ Stiles said. ‘I was running like you told me to and I literally fell over him.’ He eyed Scott’s unconscious form. ‘You said he’s turning?’

‘He was bitten by an alpha wolf.’ Cora explained. ‘He’s like Isaac, Boyd and Erica now.’

‘Not you?’ Stiles looked at Derek and he shook his head.

‘We’re born wolves.’ he said. ‘Our whole family was. Now it’s just us.’

‘So Peter is too?’ Stiles made a considering face. ‘Laura?’

‘She’s our alpha.’ Derek replied. ‘She’s the leader of our pack.’

‘Oh my God.’ Stiles’ eyes went wide and then he burst into giggles. ‘The Wolf Pack? Who’s fucking idea was that?’

‘Seriously?’ Boyd had his judgy face on. ‘That’s what you’re getting out of this?’

‘I think it’s shock.’ Stiles sniggered, wiping his eyes. ‘I need to lie down for a bit.’

‘Good idea.’ Derek said and swept him off his feet, ignoring Stiles’ feeble struggles to get down. ‘Stop wriggling. We’ll be faster this way.’

‘Ugh.’ Stiles wrapped his arms around Derek’s neck and gave in. ‘Just nobody ever talk about how I’m apparently a Disney princess in all this, okay?’

‘No promises.’ Erica cackled and ruffled his hair.

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Laura got about halfway back when she caught the scent. It was unmistakeable and she followed it, her stomach churning as it built in intensity. She’d hunted enough deer to know what exposed guts smelled like. Her fangs dropped and her mouth flooded with saliva in an instinctive response when

she walked into the clearing in front of her, now fully dressed and buckling on her utility belt.

It was a bloodbath.

There was very little recognisable as human. Laura counted possibly three individuals, but that was largely from their clothing and shoes. The girl had been decapitated, and the two boys that she could make out were ripped open from throat to abdomen. The ground squelched beneath her boots and she heaved a sigh and turned on her radio to call it in.

It was going to be a never ending night at the rate they were going.

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The house was thankfully quiet and dark when they got there. Boyd handed Scott over to Isaac over the back fence and they all trooped inside. They all looked around in interest and Derek set Stiles down gently.

'I'm going to check the fuse box.' he said and Isaac followed him back out the kitchen door.

'I think we should take him upstairs.' Stiles said to Boyd. 'We can clean him up.'

Boyd stayed close and they took Scott into the bathroom, just as the light came on. He was still passed out but Stiles was pleased to see he was breathing slow and evenly, his skin a healthy colour and the wounds in his shoulder sealed up, even if they were still an angry red and oozing a little bit.

He dug for the first aid kit under the sink and Erica came in and closed the door.

'I shut everything up downstairs.' she said. 'There's some things in the living room that have been knocked over so Cora's picking them up.' She leaned over Stiles shoulder as he contemplated Scott's shirt.

'Could you...?' he asked and she grinned, flicking out her claws. Stiles stared at them, utterly fascinated, then moved aside and watched as she made quick work of slicing Scott's shirt off of him. 'That's so cool.'

'You're really taking this well.' Boyd remarked. He had the antiseptic and was wetting some gauze with it. Stiles took it and started wiping the blood and fluid from Scott's shoulder.

'Things just make sense this way.' he replied. He knew he should be freaked out but he felt safe with them, safer even with Derek.

'He'll be okay.' Erica was sniffing delicately. 'They aren't infected. We heal super fast and it's really hard for us to get sick.'

Stiles realised what she was alluding to.

'That's why you did it?' he asked and she nodded.

'I almost died after falling off the climbing wall in gym class.' she replied. 'Laura basically saved my life.'

'Mine too.' Boyd said. 'Not quite as literally but I was headed for something bad.'

Stiles didn't press him. He could understand that feeling of helplessness.

'Isaac?' he asked and Erica's eyes flashed.

‘His dad almost killed him one night,’ she snarled. ‘He used to lock Isaac in a freezer and one night he got drunk and forgot to let him out. Isaac nearly suffocated to death. He ran and got caught by Theo and the others. They threw him in an open grave and buried him alive. Laura dug him out and she had to bite him to save his life.’

‘Fuck.’ Stiles’s hands stopped their constant movement. ‘They’re still out there.’

‘What happened anyway?’ Boyd asked. He was peering over Stiles’ other shoulder as he wet a washcloth and wiped away the rest of the blood. The puncture wounds in Scott’s side were black but they had already closed up and he gave them just enough attention to clean them.

‘They must have got the jump on Scott,’ he said. ‘I just know that we got back and Derek must have known.’

‘He did.’ Cora was standing in the doorway. Stiles hadn’t even heard her open it. ‘You can smell them all over the living room. It reeks of fear down there so they must have scared the shit out of him. No wonder he ran.’ She came over and put a hand on Stiles’ shoulder. ‘He’s okay, Stiles. Don’t worry.’

He nodded and kept cleaning. Finally satisfied, he stood up and let Boyd take Scott out the bath and carry him to his room. They got him out of his jeans and into bed and Stiles shut the door behind him.

‘He’ll sleep like the dead.’ Erica said. ‘I did and Laura was a lot nicer about how she bit me.’

‘I want to know everything.’ Stiles declared as they went back downstairs. ‘All of it.’

‘Sure.’ Cora replied from in front of him. ‘But it’s not all kittens and rainbows.’

‘That I can handle.’ Stiles said and then stopped dead on the last step when he saw Derek come out of the kitchen. He was well aware of how he’d reacted earlier and made a fool of himself by throwing himself into Derek’s arms, even if it had seemed like Derek had been receptive.

Then Derek gave him his shy smile and Stiles’ heart stuttered and all his insecurity melted away.

‘We’ll tell you everything.’ he said and stepped forward, holding out a hand to Stiles. ‘I promise.’

Stiles beamed at him and took his hand and let Derek lead him into the living room. Isaac was there already, sniffing the food containers.

‘This isn’t going to be enough.’ he said and Stiles patted his pocket and then chucked his keys at Erica.

‘Don’t break her.’ he said and she smiled and saluted him.

‘No problem, Batman.’ she replied and grabbed Boyd’s arm, towing him out with her.

Derek steered him to the couch and Stiles flopped onto it, sprawling in the corner and feeling fatigue wash over him. He knew he was coming down from the adrenaline.

‘Go get him a soda.’ Derek said softly, sitting down next to him. Isaac was the one to go. Cora had her phone out.

‘I’m going to call Peter and the others.’ she said and Derek nodded, waiting until they were alone before he took Stiles’ hand again, looking sheepish as he held it like Stiles was made of fine

porcelain.

'I'm sorry we lied to you.' he said. 'But you can imagine why.'

'I can.' Stiles was starting to put all kinds of things together. 'Is this why the fire happened?'

'Yes.' Derek looked up at him, his green eyes piercing. 'Being a werewolf has a lot of dangers attached to it, one of which you got first hand experience of tonight.'

'This alpha.' Stiles was being lulled by the way Derek's thumb was drawing small circles on his hand. 'Who is he?'

'She.' Derek corrected. 'And we don't know. The Argents told us it was someone named Ennis, but that's not true.'

'The Argents?' Stiles was surprised. 'What do they have to do with this?'

'They're hunters.' Derek said and his mouth turned down, a hard edge creeping into his voice. 'Of the supernatural.'

'Fuck me.' Stiles thought of Allison's dimples smile and harmless appearance. 'Seriously?'

'Oh yeah.' Derek muttered. 'That first day and all the weirdness with Allison? That was her declaring that she wanted a truce. They're not here for us, they're hunting the alpha. They've been tracking her since Texas.'

'So they're here to hunt her?' Stiles snuggled deeper into the couch. 'Freaky.'

'Laura is the alpha of Beacon Hills. Before her, it was my mom.' Derek moved so he could sit sideways, one leg tucked up under him. He still hadn't let go of Stiles' hand.

'And you?' Stiles asked. He felt warm and sleepy and when he looked down, he saw that there were the faintest of grey lines running up Derek's arm. 'What are you doing?'

'You're in shock.' Derek replied. 'I'm easing it a little bit. We can do that. We can also take physical pain.' He gave Stiles a meaningful look.

'My hands?' Stiles asked and he nodded. 'Peter also did it the other day. When I had a migraine. Why isn't he the alpha if he's the oldest?'

'It doesn't work like that with wolves.' Derek sighed. 'But she's the best one to be alpha. She's the strongest.'

'Okay, that makes me happy.' Stiles inched closer. Derek was radiating heat and he wanted to nestle into him and never leave. 'I'm glad my dad has her to watch his back if all this shit is going down.'

'She absolutely will.' Derek looked thoughtful. 'Let's hope he's as cool with this as you are. We're going to have to tell him and your step-mom now Scott's been bitten.'

That brought Stiles back down to earth with a bump.

'What will happen to him?' he asked and Derek shrugged.

'I don't really know.' he said. 'Technically he'll belong to the alpha that bit him, unless Laura kills her or he can resist the alpha's call.'

'Fuck.' Stiles rested his head on the back of the couch. 'This is insane.'

'It's a lot to take in.' Derek moved a little closer and Stiles took it as an invitation. He drew his own feet up, toeing off his chucks and then moving so he could wedge himself against Derek, tucking his head under his chin. Derek made a deep purring sound and wrapped his arms around him, pulling Stiles in close and nuzzling the top of his head.

'I was scared.' he murmured into Stiles' hair. 'I didn't want her to hurt you.'

'She didn't.' Stiles looked up at him and smiled. 'My big bad wolf saved me from certain death.'

Derek snorted, but he was smiling. This time he leaned in and brushed his nose against Stiles'.

'*Your* big bad wolf?' he asked and Stiles could feel his face heating up.

'Hell yeah.' he said. 'I always wanted a supernatural boyfriend.'

'Oh really?' Derek raised an eyebrow at him. 'You know you just got into town, right? People are going to talk.'

'So let them.' Stiles was so close. He could feel Derek's warm breath on his mouth and all it took was him leaning in far enough for their mouths to meet. It was barely there, the lightest brush of lips but Derek whined like a puppy and put his hand on the back of Stiles' neck, holding him there and kissing him with more force. His mouth was as warm as his hands had been, and Stiles fell into it. It stayed chaste and close-mouthed but it was enough to light up his entire body and leave him breathless when they parted.

They stared at each other and Stiles smiled to see how Derek's eyes glowed from within, turning the colour of liquid gold. He reached up and ran his fingertips along Derek's brow.

'Show me?' He watched as Derek shifted, exploring the changes in his face. 'Where do your eyebrows go?'

'I honestly have no idea.' Derek grumbled as Stiles traced the line of his nose. 'Laura and Cora always make fun of me for it.'

'I like it though.' Stiles grinned at him. 'Your other face is kind of hot.'

'Good thing you like it.' Derek deadpanned. 'It's not like I can change it.'

Stiles rolled his eyes at him and leaned in for another kiss. This one was a little more heated and he got brave and licked at Derek's mouth. That got him a soft growl and Derek opened up for him, the kiss quickly turning messy. Derek's fangs were sharp and Stiles had to negotiate them carefully, but he would have been lying if he'd said it wasn't completely hot.

Derek's face changed shape under his hand and then he tilted his head just right so their mouths fitted together perfectly and growled when Stiles moved so he was pressed back into the couch. He gave as good as he got, whimpering when Derek tugged on his bottom lip with his teeth.

'Dude.' he breathed. 'You're very fucking good at that.'

'So are you.' Derek was breathless and still partially shifted. He had one hand on Stiles' waist, fingers pressing in. 'I've been trying not to come on too strong and freak you out.'

'I haven't freaked out about you being a werewolf, dude.' Stiles said sagely. 'Mostly because you

can't come on too strong for me. I'm going to jump you pretty much whatever you do. In case you hadn't noticed, I've got a crush about a hundred miles high.'

Derek beamed at him and it was like looking directly into the sun.

'I really like you too.' His voice dipped low and then he was kissing Stiles again and all Stiles could do was hold on and go with it, his heart racing and his head fuzzy with happiness.

'Um.' Cora's voice broke through their moment and he and Derek broke apart. Then Stiles saw why she sounded like she had just seen something truly bizarre and it wasn't because she'd caught him and Derek making out on the couch.

It was more because the couch was floating a good two metres off the floor.

'Oh.' Derek peered over the edge. 'Okay, so that's not something I was expecting.'

'You and me both.' Stiles was at a loss. 'Was that me?'

'You're the Spark.' Derek said. 'It makes sense.'

'So I was thinking we could make hot chocolate and...holy shit!' Isaac stopped dead with a bag of opened Cheetos in his hands, staring at them and then frowning. 'What the fuck are you two doing up there?'

'Nothing.' Stiles laughed weakly, starting to freak out a little himself. 'Maybe a little help in getting us down?'

'Nope.' Cora took the Cheetos and shovelled a handful into her mouth. 'This is better than Netflix.'

'Fuck off, Cora.' Derek growled and then did a graceful little flip off the couch. He held up both arms. 'Jump down, I'll catch you.'

'Jesus.' Cora muttered, stomping off in disgust. 'They are so cute it makes me want to puke.'

Stiles edged himself off the couch and then more or less fell into Derek's waiting arms.

'I'm not a Disney princess.' he declared and Derek laughed and kissed him on the nose.

'Sure you're not.' he grinned.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Things are starting to hot up :) Warning for excessive cuteness and gore lol. Also apologies for not replying to comments yet!!!! It's been a mad mad week ahahahhahhah. I will be getting there but I have read them all and THANK YOU!!!!

Stiles woke with a start, blinking furiously and trying not to smack anyone in the face. The last he remembered, he'd been cuddled up with Derek on the couch watching the Food Channel, the rest of the junior wolves all sprawled over various pieces of furniture. Now he was very clearly in his own bed, the covers carefully tucked around him and his jeans and shoes off and laid out neatly on the chair at his desk.

'Hey.' Noah said, easing him back down. 'It's just me.'

Stiles focused on him and frowned.

'You look exhausted.' he said, sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

'Things got hairy last night.' Noah had deep shadows under his eyes. 'Those two missing girls turned into two missing girls and three dead kids.'

Stiles' blood ran cold. He had a funny idea he knew who they were. He also had no idea how much had been divulged and so he decided to keep his mouth shut about what had happened until he'd been given a green light.

'Okay.' He pulled the covers back up to his chin. 'Anyone I know?'

'Jesus, kid.' Noah scrubbed a hand over his face. 'We can't identify them by normal means so i can't say anything until that happens but I have an idea.'

'Shit.' Stiles said. 'How did they die?'

'Not sure.' Noah sighed. 'Looks like a wild animal attack. I'm getting some guys from the Forestry Service to have a look at the pictures, but it was brutal. There wasn't a whole lot left to work with, let's put it that way. We're doing identification through dental but the fact that I have four families that called their kids in missing last night is pretty telling.'

'Is it all of them?' Stiles asked, glad that his dad couldn't hear his heart racing. Derek had explained the night before how wolves could hear heartbeats and even tell when someone was lying and it had made him a lot more aware of it.

'We think so.' Noah said. 'A car belonging to one of the missing kids was parked in the visitor's lot. It looks like they were prowling around and ran into something nasty, although I'm at a loss as to what could have happened.' He looked shifty when he said it and Stiles knew exactly why. Noah was well aware of who the kids were and their less than happy association with Stiles.

'What are you going to do?' he asked, feigning innocence.

‘Nothing you need to worry about.’ Noah said and Stiles knew better than to press him. He already knew anyway. Derek had also told him how Laura had pretty much saved his ass from the alpha and scared it off. She had also sent a text message threatening them all with doom and destruction if they left the house. Now he knew why that was the case. It seemed to be the case that Laura had no qualms about not telling her younger siblings everything either.

There was a knock at the door and it cracked open to reveal a worried looking Melissa. Stiles had to bite his lip, realising that he and Scott hadn’t had any time to get their stories straight or even to fabricate one.

‘Hi.’ She came in, dressed for work and looking concerned. ‘Scott’s not feeling very well and he’s running a pretty serious temperature so I’m keeping him home today. I thought maybe you could stay with him. I really don’t want either of you to be alone, not after what’s happened.’

‘I agree.’ Noah said. ‘I don’t normally advocate truancy but I really think it’s going to me mayhem today. You alright to stay home and keep an eye on him?’

‘Sure.’ Stiles did an internal victory dance. He was extremely curious about what had happened because there was no way Melissa would be that calm if she’d seen the gouges and bite marks all over her son the night before. Derek and the others had said he’d heal pretty quickly and it looked like that was what had happened.

‘Okay.’ Noah got up and patted his knee through the covers. ‘I’ve got to get back, but you text me if anything happens.’

‘I will.’ Stiles said and he left, him and Melissa talking softly as they made their way downstairs. Stiles got up and watched out his window until their respective vehicles had left and then hurtled down the stairs and along the corridor to Scott’s room. He knocked and went in and saw Scott standing and staring at himself in the full length mirror that he had on his closet door. He turned, his hair flopping in his eyes, which were as big as saucers.

‘Look!’ he exclaimed and Stiles did, goggling at how every single injury had disappeared. The bite mark was now just a set of four pink marks and the gauges were silver lines that stood out a little but not enough to really draw attention unless you knew what you were looking for.

‘Fuck.’ He drew the word out, running his fingers over Scott’s skin. ‘Shit. It’s like you weren’t even bitten.’

‘I know.’ Scott looked more than a little lost. ‘What the fuck happened?’

‘How much do you remember?’ Stiles asked, and Scott shrugged.

‘I remember Theo and the rest of them chasing me into the woods.’ He went pale. ‘I had an attack, a really bad one. I couldn’t breathe.’ He looked stricken. ‘They found me. They were going to leave me to die.’

Stiles felt viciously happy that they were dead.

‘Those assholes.’ he muttered.

‘Then something made a really loud noise and they ran.’ Scott’s face creased up. ‘Something came out of the trees. It had red eyes and it sounded like it was...’ He trailed off and Stiles raised his eyebrows at him.

‘It was what?’ he asked and Scott looked even more confused.

'It spoke to me.' he hissed, like it was a secret. 'How could it speak to me, Stiles? It was an animal!'

'Hoo boy.' Stiles steered him back to bed. 'Have I got a story for you.'

-

Laura got out the shower, wrapping her towel around her head and padding back into the bedroom.

'You're dripping on the carpet.' Derek mumbled at her, still half buried in the covers. He was in her bed, the only one to have woken up when she got home. The others were all still sleeping, Erica and Boyd in his room and Isaac with Cora.

'Fuck the carpet.' Laura growled. She was still seething, her scent clogged with it. 'And where the fuck is Peter?'

Derek sat up, shrugging.

'He didn't come home from the bookshop.' he said. 'But he did call Cora and tell her he was staying out and not to expect him home before morning.'

'Great.' Laura muttered, getting her clean uniform out the closet. 'We have a homicidal alpha open the loose that's clearly trying to build a pack and he's out gallivanting.'

'Who would he be gallivanting with though?' Derek yawned hugely, his jaw cracking from the stretch and his fangs slipping out.

'I have my suspicions.' Laura came to sit down on the edge of the bed, putting on her socks and boots. She yanked the laces in annoyance and Derek moved to lean against her back. Pack being close was soothing and he felt her breathing slow and even out.

'Stay home today.' She glanced at him over her shoulder. 'I'll make the calls. The alpha has your scents now and I don't want her getting to any of you while I'm preoccupied.'

'Okay.' Derek rubbed his cheek against her shoulder. 'What about Scott and Stiles?'

'I've called Lydia to go get them. You stay together today, all of you.' Laura stood up and then leaned down to kiss the top of his head. 'And when Peter gets back, tell him I'm going to kick his ass.'

'Will do.' Derek replied and flopped back over into the duvet, snuggling down to sleep surrounded by her scent.

-

Peter startled awake and then lay completely still. He looked over, inhaling sharply at the broad expanse of back that greeted him.

'Oh shit.' He grinned madly. He had had no intention of staying over but as it turned out seeing your high school sweetheart, having a massive screaming match and then falling into bed for a night of drawn out sticky, sweaty hate-sex really took it out of a guy.

'Christ.' Chris muttered from his side. 'Is it morning already?'

'Yeah.' Peter turned on his side and wriggled up against him. 'Laura's going to kill me.'

‘Mmm.’ Chris turned over, his ice blue eyes bleary. ‘We better make sure that it was worth dying for then.’

Peter was about to protest but then he was being kissed and Chris was moving to lie on top of him and he was gloriously heavy and warm and his cock was already half hard and it would be such a waste to just ignore all of those things so Peter gave in and spread his legs to accommodate him.

‘You’re not at all how I expected you to be.’ he murmured in Chris’ ear and then whined when Chris rolled his hips, grinding down into him.

‘And you’re exactly the same.’ he replied, his words muffled by Peter’s neck. ‘Still an asshole and still under my skin.’

‘Fuck.’ Peter growled and dragged his nails down Chris’ back, thrusting up to meet him. ‘I missed you.’

Chris pulled back to look him in the eye, gently running the backs of his fingers along Peter’s jaw.

‘I missed you too.’ he said and then there was no more talking for a while.

-

Scott’s look of complete and utter astonishment never failed to amuse Stiles. He looked so perfectly surprised, his mouth hanging open and his eyes enormous.

‘Werewolves?’ he asked and his voice squeaked up like it had when he’d been thirteen and going through puberty.

‘Yeah.’ Stiles patted his knee. ‘Sorry to lay all of this on you but it’s pretty important seeing as...well, you know.’ He stared meaningfully at Scott’s side and he gulped and wrapped his arms around himself.

‘Werewolves aren’t real. I’m not a werewolf.’ He was deep in denial and Stiles sighed. Scott could be completely obstinate when he wanted to be and his go-to strategy was to just ignore things until they went away, something Stiles normally was happy to go along with. However, the current circumstances made that kind of hard to do.

‘Look.’ He moved so he could look Scott in the eye. ‘This is not a bad thing. Derek said that it means your asthma is pretty much history. You can now play all the lacrosse you want. And because Allison is in the know, she’ll totally understand when you get all hairy around the full moon.’

‘I can’t be hairy.’ Scott all but wailed. ‘And I don’t want to kill rabbits!’

‘Okay, so that was just the once Isaac said.’ Stiles made a face, regretting his decision to include the more gruesome stories he’d been told the night before. ‘Look, he’s really happy with being one. So are Erica and Boyd. And Laura is going to try and make sure that you are safe from the other alpha.’

‘Fuck.’ Scott completely deflated. ‘This is not good. What if she comes after me again.’

‘Then we ask her for help.’ Stiles said. ‘Derek said you can be pack.’

‘What about Mom and Noah?’ Scott asked, his voice suddenly much smaller. ‘What are we going to tell them?’

‘Laura’s going to handle that.’ Stiles replied. ‘She’s going to talk to him today, ask us all to come to dinner on Friday. Ease them into it.’

He waited and finally Scott blew out a deep breath and sat back against his headboard.

‘Okay.’ he said. ‘What do I have to do?’

‘I have no idea.’ Stiles said, grinning when Scott made an exasperated noise and hid under his comforter.

-

Derek was in the kitchen when he heard the car at the end of the drive. He went to pour a second mug of coffee and sat down, slumped at the counter as he waited. Peter slunk in not two minutes later, looking simultaneously wrecked and completely smug. He stopped dead when he saw Derek, who reared back as his nose was assaulted.

‘Jesus.’ He gave his uncle a questioning look. ‘Why do you smell like you spent the whole night literally bathing in jizz?’

‘Maybe because I did.’ Peter replied, taking the coffee off the counter and taking a gulp and then looking nonplussed when Derek stared at him. ‘What? It’s not like you can’t smell it so I’m not going to bother denying it.’

‘Who?’ Derek asked. ‘Also you know Laura’s going to kick your ass when she catches up with you. You missed all the drama.’

‘So I hear.’ Peter grimaced and took his phone out. It registered eight missed calls and another ten text messages. ‘I haven’t been brave enough to find out just what I missed, so how about you summarise it for me?’

‘Okay.’ Derek grinned into his mug. ‘But you’re not going to like it.’

-

Stiles hadn’t been expecting anybody when he went downstairs in search of food so he was surprised to hear the doorbell ring. He went to answer, checking through the window first and getting a glimpse of fiery hair and opening the door to his visitor.

‘Hi.’ He stood aside as Lydia swept in. ‘I wasn’t expecting to see you here.’

‘I heard all about your little adventure and I’m so far ahead in my studies that one day really isn’t going to make a difference.’ she said, turning around in a swirl of teal green dress. ‘Now, go drag Scott out of bed. I’m taking you both over to the Hales. We’re having a puppy pile.’

‘Puppy pile?’ Stiles perked up. ‘Okay, that sounds both adorable and snuggly.’

‘It is.’ Lydia smiled. ‘Danny and Jackson picked the short straw to go to school and keep an eye on Allison, so they’ll be joining us later but everyone else is at the house already.’

‘Because of the alpha?’ Stiles asked and Lydia smirked at him.

‘You don’t know everything yet.’ she said, eyes sparkling. ‘But I know about you.’

‘Ow.’ Stiles brushed aside the finger she had jabbed him in the chest with. ‘Those are pointy.’ He narrowed his eyes at her. ‘Also, how do you know?’

'I know everything.' Lydia tossed her head. 'And you're not the only magical creature in town.'

Stiles gaped at her.

'You?' He lowered his voice. 'What are you?'

'A banshee.' Lydia replied. 'It's not quite how the mythology makes us out, but yeah. My grandmother was one and it came to me because it skips any male children, although interestingly there are a couple of recorded instances where it seems to follow gender rather than physiology so that's very interesting.' She stopped speaking when she saw his face start to contort into an expression of bemusement. 'Okay, so not the time for my theories on gender and supernatural lineages. Get Scott out of bed, grab your laptop and let's go.'

'My laptop?' Stiles asked, one foot on the first step.

'Yes.' Lydia made a shooing gesture at him. 'Now you're in the know, I'm going to take over your supernatural education. There's a whole wide underworld out there that you're about to be introduced to.'

Stiles' smile nearly split his face. He thundered up the stairs, nearly galloping to Scott's room and half hanging in the doorway.

'Get you ass up.' he said. 'We're going to the Hales.'

'Um.' Scott looked confused. 'Okay.'

Stiles rapped the doorframe twice and did a quick stop in his own room. He considered what to wear, settling for an old pair of jeans and a plain t-shirt, grabbing his softest hoodie and putting on his sneakers. He picked up his pendant from the nightstand and put it on, grabbing his backpack and laptop. The last thing was Aneta's grimoire, which went in the front pocket.

Scott met him on the stairs and they went down together to find Lydia standing in the hall, one hand pressed to the wall.

'What do you know about this house?' she asked, her eyes a little vacant when she looked at them.

'Not a lot.' Stiles didn't want to say too much in front of Scott, not just yet. He was still getting his head around the whole werewolf thing. 'It's not something we've had a conversation about. He gave her a meaningful look, flicking his eyes to Scott so she'd get the message. It seemed to work. Lydia's eyes cleared and she nodded.

'We can talk about it later.' she said. 'Ready to go?'

'Sure.' Stiles shoved Scott in front of him, snickering when he tripped. 'I'm guessing you know what happened to Scott.'

'I do.' Lydia grinned at them over her shoulder. 'I'm also pack.'

'Is everyone here some kind of weirdo?' Scott protested. Stiles snorted at him and herded him out the door.

'More or less, yes.' Lydia was already at her car. 'I'd quote Shakespeare right now if I thought you;d get the reference but I'm afraid it might bypass you.'

Scott resorted to his best insult, sticking his tongue out at her. Lydia smirked and got in. Scott took

the back seat and Stiles hopped in next to her. He was busy doing up his seatbelt when he had a thought and dug out his phone. He shot a quick message to Noah, saying they were going over the Hales and then gave Lydia his most winning smile.

‘All done.’ he declared. ‘Let’s mosey.’

‘Never say that again.’ Lydia said and started the car. Stiles was intrigued, having only been to the house once and that was from the preserve. They passed the overgrown drive to the burned down house and Stiles shivered, goose bumps breaking out on his arms. He saw Lydia’s eyes flick to them and she pressed her lips together but said nothing.

The road curved around, the trees getting thicker until they got to a smaller drive that ran through a tunnel of oak trees. It opened up at the end and there was the farmhouse. Stiles saw Erica’s truck, a black Camaro, a silver Mercedes and a very sensible looking gunmetal Toyota Cruiser. Lydia parked next to it and they got out.

‘Wow.’ Scott looked pleasantly surprised and moved past them. ‘I thought they lived in a wreck.’

‘That’s what you get for listening to assholes.’ Stiles snorted.

‘Not anymore.’ Lydia muttered under her breath and then glanced at him. ‘I’ll explain when we get inside.’

She led them to the front porch and Stiles got a warm feeling inside remembering Derek bringing him to the house. It felt like a lifetime away from everything that had happened. He smiled, stretching up on impulse to brush his fingers over the symbols above the door, the now familiar zing a lot more pleasant.

‘Oh.’ Lydia stopped in the doorway and looked back at him. ‘You learned fast.’

‘Learned what?’ Stiles asked and then grinned when he saw Peter in the kitchen doorway. ‘Hi.’

‘Stiles.’ Peter looked tired but he was smiling. ‘And our latest addition, I see.’ He moved forward and offered a hand to Scott. ‘I’m Peter Hale. You must be Scott.’

‘Yeah?’ Scott looked pleadingly at Stiles. He was clearly more than a little freaked out and Stiles had no idea why until Lydia nudged him.

‘It’s a wolf thing.’ she explained. ‘Scott’s reacting like an omega would in the face of a cohesive pack. He’s feeling threatened even if he doesn’t realise it.’

‘I am?’ Scott asked but he was now edging closer to Stiles.

‘You certainly smell like it.’ Peter’s grin wasn’t exactly reassuring. ‘But believe me when I say that it’s not exactly reassuring having you here and smelling like an interloping alpha. Laura is allowing you freedom that she ordinarily wouldn’t because you’re young and have no idea what has just happened to you. And also because you’re attached to Stiles and she’d rather die than make Derek get out the puppy eyes.’ His smile turned wicked. ‘Who, by the way, is currently changing for what is probably the tenth time since he found out that you were coming over.’ He looked at the ceiling and chuckled and Stiles wondered just what Derek had said to get such a reaction.

‘Where is everybody else?’ he asked and Peter looked at Scott.

‘Why don’t you tell them?’ he asked and Scott floundered.

'I don't know.' he protested and Peter snorted.

'You can.' he said. 'Consider this your first lesson. Focus on the house and then listen.'

Scout looked perplexed but then his face started to smooth out.

'I can hear two people over there.' he pointed towards the ceiling in the direction of the living room, then went bright red. 'Oh.'

'That'll be Erica and Boyd.' Peter laughed and then tilted his head. 'Derek's just told them off for fucking in his bed.'

'There's somebody in the shower.' Scott's brow creased with effort. 'And someone on the roof?'

'Isaac likes the morning sun.' Peter patted Scott on the shoulder as he moved past him. 'Not bad. You'll get better.'

'You're not staying?' Lydia asked and he stopped to kiss the top of her head.

'I'm going to the shop.' he said. 'I have an appointment.'

'With who?' Lydia demanded but he just waggled his fingers over his shoulder and left the house. Stiles could hear him whistling and then the sound of a car door.

'He seems kind of...' He made a vague gesture and Lydia pulled a face.

'Peter isn't the kind to reveal his hand too early.' she said, pulling on Stiles' sleeve. 'He's up to something though. I'd bet my left tit on it.'

'You two must make quiet the sparring partners.' Stiles grinned and set his laptop down on the coffee table, which was really just a huge repurposed trunk. He looked around the room, taking in the details that he hadn't the last time. The couches were big and squishy, there was a huge leather wingback chair that he just knew was Peter's and the furniture was all heavy wood. The walls were covered in pictures and he moved to look at the first one. It was a family group, adults and younger teens and a few kids as well. He recognised Derek and Cora and who he assumed to be Laura. Peter was at the side with a woman who Stiles knew was Derek's mother, Talia. His after was sandy haired and built a lot like his son, tall and broad shouldered.

'The Hales.' Lydia was at his shoulder. 'Before the fire.'

'They look close.' Stiles felt incredibly sad, seeing so many smiling faces that were now gone.

'They were.' Lydia replied, her face unreadable. She gleaned back and saw that Scott was on his phone. 'They were my awakening.'

'Your what?' Stiles asked and she nodded over at Scott. 'Oh.'

'The kitchen.' she said and he followed her, wondering who Scott was trying to get hold of.

Once they were alone, Lydia started talking.

'Banshees have what we call an awakening.' she said, moving to the fridge. 'Do you know much about the mythology?'

'Banshees scream for the dead.' Stile said and then put two and two together. 'The house. You can feel it?'

‘Yes.’ Lydia started setting out bacon and sausage and a container of mushrooms. ‘Grab me the eggs would you?’

‘What’s it like?’ Stiles asked and she shrugged.

‘Some banshees spend their entire lives not knowing what they are.’ She took the carton from him. ‘The Hale fire was enough to wake me screaming from a dead sleep. All I could feel was pain and terror and I was catatonic for a week afterwards. That was when I discovered my family’s little legacy that my father had tried to keep hidden. Do you know, he actually had my grandmother committed to Eichen House? Let’s just say there’s a reason he doesn’t live with us anymore.’

‘Damn.’ Stiles stared at her. ‘That sucks.’

‘It’s like I see it.’ Lydia said. ‘I start off hearing things, whispers. If I focus they become voices telling me that someone’s going to die.’ She gave him a meaningful look. ‘So you can guess how my evening was.’

‘Shit.’ Stiles leaned back against the counter. ‘You felt it?’

‘All of it.’ Lydia started cracking eggs into a bowl. ‘I knew what was coming and let me tell you, I never want to see anything like it again.’

‘Gross.’ Stiles was hooked on every word, so engrossed by what she started describing that he didn’t even hear someone come in until two strong arms went around his waist and he got a blast of deodorant and a faceful of Derek in the back of his neck. He twisted around and beamed at him. ‘Hi.’

‘Hi.’ Derek was smiling brightly, his whole face lit up. He leaned in and Stiles let out a squawk when he was thoroughly kissed, a little breathless when Derek let him come up for air.

‘Jesus.’ Lydia muttered, pushing the bacon at them. ‘Stop making out and make yourselves useful instead.’

‘No.’ Derek had his face in Stiles’ neck and there was some serious snuffling going on. ‘Now he knows, I can take advantage.’

‘Ugh.’ Lydia looked mildly ill. ‘Fine, just multitask okay?’

Stiles grinned as Derek let him go, throwing him a smile that was suddenly predatory.

‘Scott’s in the living room.’ he said, getting out a pan and snagging the packet of bacon, easing out a claw and slitting it open. ‘He smells like he’s having a silent coronary.’

‘Shit.’ Stiles said and dashed back to find Scott looking at his phone with a weird expression on his face. ‘Hey, you okay?’

‘Not exactly.’ Scott replied. ‘I tried to call Theo so I could tell him what an asshole he is, but it’s going straight to voicemail.’

‘Yeah.’ Stiles wrung his hands wondering how the hell he was going to even approach telling Scott that all the people he’d literally just made friends with were dead. ‘About that...’

He didn’t get any further because he was pretty much bowled over by Erica as she bounded into the living room and wrapped her arms around him.

‘Stiles!’ Her dark eyes were sparkling. ‘Puppy pile!’

‘I heard about that.’ Stiles laughed and let himself get bounced. ‘I’m looking forward to it.’

‘Good.’ Erica said and he bellowed in his ear. ‘Isaac, bring down all the stuff!’

‘Jesus.’ Boyd was now in the doorway, shirtless and barefoot in ripped jeans. Stiles allowed himself a quick ogle, wondering how a senior even managed muscle definition like that. ‘Erica, use your inside voice please.’

‘So.’ Erica ignored him and turned her full attention to Scott. ‘How’s the new cub doing?’

‘Erm.’ Scott was looking lost at sea again. ‘Cub?’

‘Yeah.’ Boyd ambled over and his grin was every bit as predatory as Derek’s had been as he sniffed at Scott. Stiles was amazed at how they all hid it so well at school. ‘You’re the newest bite, that makes you the cub.’

‘So Stiles says you’re all werewolves.’ Scott asked, still looking uncertain.

‘That’s right.’ Boyd replied and his eyes flashed gold. To Stiles’ complete surprise, so did Scott’s and Erica squealed loud enough to bring the roof down. She grabbed Scott and all but smooshed him.

‘Oh, you’re so damn cute.’ She had his face between her hands and her own eyes were now also burning gold. ‘Like a freaking chocolate labrador puppy.’

‘Is that good?’ Scott managed to get out from his pursed lips. He looked like a fish and Stiles snickered noisily.

‘So good.’ Erica growled happily. ‘You’re going to love it. WE have puppy piles and full moon runs and you’ll be able to kick everyone’s ass at lacrosse.’

‘Oh God.’ Boyd chuckled. ‘Another wolf on the team.’

‘That’s right.’ It was Isaac. He had both hands in the pockets of his sweatpants and he was also shirtless and wearing a lazy satisfied smile. Erica bared her teeth at him as he came closer.

‘You better be careful.’ she sing-songed. ‘Derek will beat your ass for smelling that much like Cora.’

‘Cora’s a big girl.’ Isaac smiled and he looked completely smitten. ‘She’s perfectly capable of holding her own.’

‘Oh really.’ Then next moment Isaac was in a headlock and snarling as Derek wrestled him to the floor and pummelled him. ‘Well, Cora’s in the shower so you’re fair game Lahey.’

‘Stop it!’ Isaac was honest to God giggling and trying to escape but Stiles knew from experience that Derek was heavy and freakishly strong. He stepped back to avoid getting hit and looked at the other two wolves, who were both grinning from ear to ear.

‘Is it always like this?’ he asked, leaning back as the snarling pair on the ground rolled past him. Next to him, Scott had his feet pulled up and was watching with unconcealed envy. He’d never been one for horseplay, too prone to attacks if he got too excited. Now, Stiles thought gleefully, he’d be able to play rough all he wanted.

‘Always.’ Erica linked her arm thought his. ‘Let’s go see what Mom’s making.’

‘Mom?’ Stiles asked and Erica sniggered and tapped the side of her nose.

‘Alpha mate.’ she said. ‘She’s Mom.’

‘Does that make Laura, Dad?’ Stiles asked.

‘No, it makes her Alpha.’ Boyd followed them into the kitchen.

‘Oh good, reinforcements.’ Lydia said. ‘And tell those idiots not to break anything.’

Erica just laughed and started on the bacon that Derek had abandoned. Boyd took the mushrooms, chopping them up and adding them to another pan with more butter than Stiles thought was healthy. Then again, wolves had no health problems in the traditional sense so they could obviously eat what they wanted.

‘Goddammit.’ Derek came into the kitchen a moment later, examining his t-shirt. It now had four large rips in it and he sighed and peeled it off. Stiles did a double take, his mouth dropping open. Derek’s tanned skin was uniform in colour and silky looking, his treasure trail a thick line of black hair leading from his belly button into his jeans. It made Stiles’ mouth go dry as he followed it down and back up again, past dusky nipples to amused green eyes.

‘Jesus, Stiles.’ Erica laughed. ‘Close your mouth, you look like a bass.’

Stiles met Derek’s eyes, his heart rate skyrocketing.

‘You try looking at that and not being all...’ He completely forgot what he was going to say and Derek’s smile grew wider.

‘Twitterpated?’ Lydia asked sweetly and then hip checked him as she brought a huge bowl of scrambled eggs covered in melted cheese and sprinkled with jalapenos to the table. ‘Oh Bambi, I’m so disappointed in you.’ She winked at him and then gave Derek an arched eyebrow. ‘Although Thumper over there is not a hell of a lot better.’

‘Oooh.’ Erica crowed. ‘Bambi and Thumper! That’s perfect. Because the eyes and the bunny teeth!’ She cackled and Derek switched immediately from grin to glare and gave her the finger. It was astonishing how his eyebrows seemed actually sentient and Stiles sighed dreamily and then remembered he was in company.

Breakfast was completed by a huge platter of bacon, fried mushrooms and two whole loaves of toast. Scott and Isaac came in talking about lacrosse and Scott joined Stiles in gaping at the amount of food.

‘Wolves eat a lot.’ Derek explained, coming back from a large fridge in the pantry with four cartons of fruit juice held against his body and a couple of gallon bottles of milk in each hand.

‘Jesus Christ.’ Stiles stared outright. ‘So this super strength thing?’

‘Goes with being a wolf.’ It was Cora. Her hair was still wet from the shower and she was in a workout top and leggings, coming to work her way under Derek’s arm so he could nuzzle her, before moving on to drape herself over Lydia. Lydia petted her and Cora dropped into the chair between her and Isaac. Erica and Boyd shuttled Scott into another down the end of the table and Derek took the one on Lydia’s other side, pulling Stiles down into the chair next to him.

‘Okay.’ Lydia was primly shaking out her napkin. She’d set the table with care, the china clearly old and the cutlery mismatched but obviously loved and that gave Stiles another twinge, knowing that whatever had been at the farmhouse had obviously been all that was left. ‘Let’s say grace.’

‘Grace!’ the others yelled, startling him and Scott into nearly jumping a foot off their seats.

‘Holy fuck.’ Stiles clutched at his heart.

‘Aww, see.’ Erica kicked him under the table. ‘Now you guys are in the know, we can be as loud as we want.’

‘Oh God.’ Lydia rolled her eyes. ‘Just when I thought I’d get some normality.’

‘Normality is for the weak.’ Derek smiled at her and she narrowed her eyes at him as he nabbed the bacon and then dumped a pile on Stiles’ plate, growling when Isaac reached across for it.

‘Oh that’s so disgustingly cute.’ Cora made vomiting noises. ‘You’re already trying to provide for him.’

Derek stopped midway through giving Stiles more bacon, even though his plate was already half covered by it, and went bright red in the ears. Stiles was utterly charmed.

‘Is that another wolf thing?’ he asked and Derek gave him a shy nod and finally relinquished the bacon after taking some for himself.

‘It’s instinct.’ he mumbled and Stiles wanted to kiss every inch of his stupidly perfect face.

‘Well I like it.’ He bumped Derek’s shoulder with his. ‘You can provide for me anytime.’

Derek beamed at him and then snarled when Isaac made another move towards the toast.

‘Oh for fuck’s sake.’ Lydia hissed and swatted at their hands with the aforementioned napkin. ‘Can you two behave?’

‘Nope.’ Derek had won the toast challenge and was offering it to Stiles. He took two pieces and passed it on to Scott. ‘You forget...’

‘We were literally raised by wolves.’ Cora chimed in with him and then they broke into peals of laughter.

‘Dude.’ Boyd shook his head. ‘That is still the worst joke ever.’

‘True though.’ Cora cackled and picked up her sausage, snapping it in half and grinning at Stiles with her fangs out. ‘But I don’t think it bothers Stiles’ any.’

‘Not at all.’ Stiles was digging in happily. He grinned at a dumbstruck Scott. ‘He might take a while to get used to it though.’

‘That’s okay.’ Erica leaned over and wrapped an arm around Scott’s neck, nearly choking him in her enthusiasm. ‘We grow on you, kind of like a wolfy fungus.’

‘Oh great.’ Scott choked. ‘I can’t wait.’

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Laura was on a mission, walking steadily through the trees. She’d volunteered to go help the Forestry Service team in the preserve in an attempt to try and find either of the missing girls while

Noah stayed and took command of the clearing where they had found the remains of the three teenagers, now confirmed by their coroner. They would need to be identified through dental records in the case of the girls and DNA in the case of the two boys, who were so mutilated that they were barely recognisable as even being human.

She was also sniffing discreetly for the trail left by the alpha. The entire clearing reeked of her, a sweet corrupted smell bordering on rotten, and it was easy to track her deeper into the preserve. Funnily enough, she hadn't been drawn towards the Nemeton which only gave Laura further cause to think she was a human that had been recently turned. She pondered what Chris had said, that the alpha had killed his after and his wife. He'd been lying, albeit skillfully and Laura was starting to think she knew why. If maybe his wife had survived long enough to kill the alpha that had bitten her, she'd inherit his power. Being a new wolf with no anchor or pack to ground her would have been disastrous in itself. Throw in uncontrollable alpha power and it was now surprise she'd gone feral.

'Why here though?' she neutered to herself, stopping to trace a paw print left in the dirt. She'd long left the Forestry people behind and now she stood up, brushing dirt from her hands. Her radio crackled and she answered it.

'Boss?' She turned, lifting her nose into the breeze.

'We got some confirmed IDs on those kids in the clearing.' Noah sounded weary and she felt sympathy for him. He'd left San Francisco hoping for a comfortable quiet job in a picture perfect town and instead he'd ended up in Beacon Hills where the Nemeton pretty much guaranteed that nothing was what it seemed.

'Go ahead.' she replied. 'They're out of earshot.'

'It's them.' he said. 'Except for Theo Raeken. Coroner just confirmed that there's only three bodies. Tracy was cut and dried but the one torso has a tattoo which belonged to Donovan and the other has an appendicitis scar which identifies him as Matt Daehler.'

'Damn.' Laura peered into the trees. Her sense were on alert and she focused in, catching a glimpse of something shiny. 'Can you give me a minute, I think I've just seen something.'

'What?' Noah asked, his voice tinny and concerned. 'Laura?'

Laura didn't reply, moving quickly through the trees and then stopping dead.

'Oh fuck.' she breathed, looking up at the scene in front of her.

'Laura?' Noah was starting to sound urgent so she answered.

'You need to get another team out.' she said into the radio. 'Call in the CSI from Devenford.'

'Jesus.' Noah groaned. 'Please tell me we don't have another one.'

Laura stared at the girl. She looked young, barely older than Cora. Someone had strung her up between two spruces, her arms outstretched and tied tight like she was flying. Her dark head drooped but Laura didn't need to see her face to know she was dead and had been for at least twelve hours judging by the smell of her. Her clothes were in place, but there was a suspicious pattern of staining and Laura would bet good money that she was cut up under her dress. Blood had run down her bare legs and feet and dripped onto the ground and dried in a dark patch.

'Yeah.' she said. 'We've got another one.'

Chapter 13

Stiles and Scott managed to eke out staying off school for one more day but on Friday morning, Melissa announced they were both going back. Nothing more had happened since the discovery of Emily, the first of the missing girls. Caitlin was still missing, as was Theo and when They got to school on Friday morning, the place was still buzzing with all the gossip.

Stiles exchanged looks with Scott, who edged closer to him with his shoulders hunched while Stiles got his books out of his locker. His ears were still sensitive and he was clearly overwhelmed by the noise and the barrage of scents. Derek had explained in detail what exactly werewolves could smell when he and Cora had come over the previous day after school and spent the evening playing Mario Kart and keeping him and Scott company. The others had been at their respective homes and Peter had been scarce as well, although Laura had called Scott later in the evening and he'd spent a good hour on the phone to her. It had calmed him down considerably as he'd been ansty the whole day, jumping at noises that Stiles couldn't hear and making odd growling noises which then prompted him to slap both hands over his mouth.

Stiles had been a little disappointed that he hadn't shifted yet but Derek and Cora had both said that Scott would probably shift on the full moon and would need to be kept isolated until he could control himself. The dinner to tell Noah and Melissa was still on and they were due at the Hale house later. He scanned the corridor for the pack, startling when he turned around and found himself face to face with Jackson, who grinned and shifted his backpack to his shoulder.

'There you two are.' he said, smirking at them. 'I got told to come and find you.'

'Why?' Stiles frowned. 'Where's Derek and Cora? They didn't come to get a ride this morning.'

'They're busy.' Jackson said. 'Pack stuff.'

'Doesn't that include you though? And why didn't they say anything?' Stiles asked with a raised eyebrow and Jackson grinned.

'The best thing about being me is that I don't have to deal with all the formal pack bullshit.' he said. 'And some things are secret. There's enough bullshit with hunters that we don't announce everything we do. You can't be too careful.'

'Makes sense.' Stiles shut his locker. 'I guess you're not going to tell us anything?'

'Nope.' Jackson clapped a hand on Scott's shoulder. 'But I am going to try and recruit myself a new player.'

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The drive to Devenford was about two hours and Derek leaned his forehead against the window and watched the scenery flash past. Laura had a heavy foot.

'You're going to talk to him this afternoon?' she was saying and Peter nodded from his position in the passenger seat.

'I am.' he said. 'Erin was very helpful and she made a number of suggestions.'

'Good.' Laura glanced at Derek in the back seat. 'You're going back to school when we're done here. Make sure that the others are safe.'

She'd been tense since the discovery of the missing girl. Once she'd explained what had happened, Peter had been equally unsettled and it was throwing the pack dynamic out the window. Derek knew it was significant and that there was bad magic afoot but that was about all. Without a proper emissary, they were flying a bit blind but both Laura and Peter were adamant about not going to Deaton for help.

They finally got to town and drove through. Their destination was in the woods to the east and the unassuming gate they turned into led through thick trees until they were drawing up in front of a low complex of buildings in dark stained wood. They were linked by covered walkways and had beautifully laid out gardens in between them, the air thick with the scent of plants when they got out.

There was a wolf waiting for them at the front entrance. He was somewhere in his thirties with shaggy dark brown hair that brushed his collar, casual in jeans and plaid shirt, his bearded face split in a cheerful smile that belied the watchfulness in his sharp blue eyes.

'Demarco.' Laura said, her eyes glowing red. Demarco's eyes glowed gold in reply and he stepped aside.

'Alpha Hale.' He grinned at them and gestured for them to go in. 'Alpha Ito is waiting for you.'

Laura nodded, acknowledging the Ito Second and walked past him, leaving them to say hello. Peter greeted him in a friendly fashion. He and Demarco knew each other quite well, even though Demarco was some years younger. Derek and Cora both muttered their respective hellos, disinclined to engage him in conversation. He was too old for them to be friends and they had a far better relationship with Satomi's younger betas. Unfortunately they would all be at school.

There were a few other wolves around. Satomi's pack was considerably larger than their own and they all lived together in the complex, with new buildings added on as their numbers grew. Eating and socialising were done in communal areas and the younger wolves all bunked together. It was very different to the Hales and the way they had insulated themselves in their family pack.

'She's in her office.' Demarco had taken the lead again and showing them to a building on the far side of the quad they were in. There was a long sunken koi pond in the open space and several young maples, their leaves already red. He got to the door and slid it open to reveal a long room with a wooden floor. Inside there were tatami mats on the floor and a long low table in dark wood with floor cushions surrounding it.

On the far side sat Satomi Ito, one of the most venerable alphas on the West Coast. She had been alpha of the Ito pack for well over fifty years, one of the oldest of their kind anywhere in the world. Nobody seemed to know her real age but it was surmised she was over a hundred, even though her physical appearance was of a woman half that age. Today she had her thick black hair pinned up and was wearing a simple white line shirt and plain black pants, her feet bare. What made her so interesting was that she had gained her power not through lineage but through challenge, being a bitten wolf. She had been friends with their grandmother and later Talia as well and Derek had always admired her greatly.

'Alpha Hale.' Satomi's voice was soft, carrying an unmistakable air of authority.

'Alpha Ito.' Laura inclined her head and they flashed their eyes at each other. 'Thank you for taking the time to see us.'

'Of course.' Satomi said and then the formality evaporated and she smiled, getting up and coming around the table to embrace Laura warmly. 'My dear girl. How are you?'

‘Fine thank you, Satomi.’ Laura was smiling. Satomi had been her mentor when she’d become alpha after the fire, teaching her to control her power and not become feral or bloodthirsty as so many new alphas did. ‘I just wish it was under better circumstances.’

‘As do I.’ Satomi came to Peter next, pinching his cheek like a maiden aunt. ‘Peter. Still so handsome I see.’

‘You’re a terrible flirt, Satomi.’ Peter chuckled, then handed her the book he was carrying, wrapped carefully in a length of red watered silk. ‘For you.’

‘A gift?’ Satomi’s eyes glowed with pleasure and she unwrapped it, her whole face lighting up when she saw what it was. ‘Hokusai diptychs? Peter, this is too much.’

‘Nonsense.’ Peter snorted. ‘You’re the only person I know who can truly appreciate this.’

‘I will.’ Satomi handed it off to Demarco. ‘Tea please.’

‘Yes, Alpha.’ Demarco nodded and moved away to place the book on her desk at the side of the room before leaving via a second door. Talia had seen visitors in her study at the house and Peter had performed the same function. Now he took a seat on Laura’s left. Derek took the one on her right with Cora next to him as the youngest after getting the same treatment as Peter. Satomi gave excellent hugs and smelled good, like cedar and tea and jasmine and they both let her scent them gently.

‘So.’ Satomi said when she was done and they were all seated. ‘You have an alpha problem.’

‘Not just an alpha problem.’ Laura replied and laid the brown folder on the table between them. ‘That I can handle. This is something else and I do not know what it is.’

Satomi made a thoughtful noise as she opened the folder. Inside were pictures and Derek flinched when she laid them out. He wasn’t so hardened that the sight of dismembered bodies wasn’t distressing. Next to him Cora was making a face, similarly unsettled.

‘Those were the alpha.’ Laura told Satomi. ‘Three teenagers at the local high school. One of them is still missing.’

‘She’s clearly feral.’ Satomi said, flicking through the photographs. ‘And you think this could be...?’

‘We have a suspicion that it may be one of the Argents.’ Peter said and satomi’s face changed to an expression of surprise.

‘They have a fearsome reputation.’ She gathered the photos up and set them aside. ‘I would be beyond surprised if they had allowed one of their own to not only be bitten but to turn. They always take their own lives before that happens. Deucalion can tell you that much from his experience with Alexander Argent.’

‘Chris and Allison Argent moved to town two weeks ago.’ Laura explained. ‘He approached me as the Code dictates but he lied about the alpha. He said it was Ennis.’

‘I made some enquiries and you are right in your suspicions.’ Satomi looked intently at Laura. ‘Especially seeing as how he was killed about a month ago trying to rescue Kali from these very same hunters.’

‘What?’ Laura blurted out and she and Peter both looked astonished. Derek could smell their

surprise. He glanced at Cora and she shrugged minutely.

‘It’s been kept very quiet.’ Satomi said gravely. ‘Deucalion became aware that there was a group of hunters that were operating outside the Code in Arizona. He sent Ennis to investigate with some of his pack. A few weeks later, he reported back that they had captured Kali and were holding her in Texas. His last call to Deucalion was about a prospective rescue. He had the support of his pack and Kali’s including her emissary Julia Baccari, who was a powerful Druid. He thought it would be a simple mission but after a week had passed with no further word, Deucalion went looking for them. He found the alphas tortured to death in a warehouse in Austin and both packs slaughtered at a compound just outside the city. So you see, there is no way it could be Ennis or Kali as they are both very dead.’

‘Jesus.’ Peter muttered, looking at a pale-faced Laura. Her hands were gripping the edge of the table and Derek knew she was fighting to keep her claws in.

‘Do you have any proof it was Argents?’ she finally asked and Satomi sighed.

‘I don’t.’ she replied. ‘But I can tell you that Gerard and Victoria Argent have not been seen or heard from since April.’

‘Chris was telling the truth about that.’ Laura said. ‘His heart only wavered when he was talking about the alpha.’

‘Well, if it’s not one of them, then who the hell is it?’ Peter demanded. ‘An Argent would not allow themselves to turn and both alphas are dead. Could it have been one of their pack?’

‘No.’ Satomi shook her head. ‘The only person not accounted for in terms of remains was the emissary, and who can tell when a druid dies what happens to them. Either way, it couldn’t be anyone from Ennis’ pack or Kali’s.’

‘A druid.’ Laura was growing and she gestured at the folder. ‘Could a druid do that?’

Satomi moved on to the second set of photos and her immaculate dark brows nearly flew off her head.

‘Oh.’ Her frown turned to deep concern. ‘That is not good.’

‘No, it’s not.’ Laura was looking at Peter. ‘So?’

‘This is nothing that a druid would do.’ Satomi replied. ‘This is an affront to everything they represent. It is sacrilege to slaughter an innocent in a sacred wood. This has been done to raise power, I can tell you that much.’

‘Using the Nemeton?’ Peter asked and she murmured assent. ‘Is that even possible?’

‘It’s dying but not yet lost all its power.’ Satomi said. ‘The right kind of sacrifices would resurrect it and restore it to what it was before the murder of your pack.’

And the wrong kind of sacrifices?’ Laura asked and Satomi placed the photos on the table in front of her.

‘They would turn it into a beacon for every kind of supernatural evil that exists.’ she replied. ‘And that would put us all in terrible danger.’

School seemed to drag along and nothing that Stiles did, including constructing elaborate daydreams about Derek, seemed to snap him out of the weird funk he was in. Next to him, Lydia was texting in complete defiance of Harri's rules, her face set. Like Jackson she'd not said anything about where the Hales had gone but Stiles could see she was clearly worried. Not only that, but Allison was also looking worse for wear. Her face was drawn and there were dark shadows under her eyes and she was fidgeting so badly that she kept dropping her pen. Scott kept picking it up for her and his jack-in-the-box impression would have been hilarious if they didn't know why she was acting like she was. She had said nothing about the alpha or hunting but Derek had told them the day before that Lydia was keeping an eye on her. Stiles hadn't had a chance to talk to her because she'd run into homeroom just before the bell rang and then avoided them for the rest of the day.

Harris was expounding on the properties of sodium and Stiles tuned him out, looking at Allison carefully. He glanced back at Lydia and raised an eyebrow at her, hoping to convey what he was thinking and pleasantly surprised when she looked at him, then at Allison, and nodded. A second later his phone buzzed.

Lunchtime. Jackson can take Scott to talk to Finstock and we can corner her.

The bell finally rang and Allison all but bolted out the room, leaving Scott sighing in her wake.

'She smells like flowers.' His brown eyes were shiny with admiration.

'It's probably wolfsbane.' Lydia muttered. 'I'll bet anything that those bags under her eyes are from patrolling all night.'

'I agree.' Jackson said, appearing out of nowhere and giving Stiles a small heart attack.

'Jesus.' He blew out a deep breath. 'Can you all stop sneaking up on me? I'm stressed out enough as it is.'

'You're so jumpy.' Jackson snickered and then elbowed Scott. 'You ready to go impress Finstock, McCall?'

As if a switch had been flipped, Scott's dreamy face turned into one of sheer focus.

'Yes.' He gave Stiles a brilliant smile. 'I'm going to play lacrosse!'

'Just make sure you don't go overboard.' Jackson rolled his eyes. 'Come on, Danny's going to play goal. He's meeting us at the locker room.'

'That's our cue.' Allison said and then made a pleased sound when she spotted long blonde curls. 'Erica!'

Erica shoved through the crowd to get to them and then wrinkled her nose.

'Wolfsbane?' she asked and Lydia gave Stiles a triumphant look.

'We need to find Allison. Help us track her down.'

'No problem.' Erica's nostrils flared and Stiles watched, completely fascinated. 'She's heading for the back door.'

She led them through the corridors until they got to the rear exit that led to the staff parking and the sports fields.

'You need me for backup?' she asked and Lydia shook her head.

'You'll probably just make her clam up,' she said. 'Stiles and I can handle this.'

'Okay,' Erica gave them a toothy grin. 'But yell if you need me to kick her ass.'

She trotted off and left them standing there, peering through the glass pane in the door.

'There,' Lydia opened it and Stiles followed her out. Allison was moving quickly, taking the pathway to the playing fields and walking like her life depended on it.

'Where is she going?' Stiles muttered as they followed, trying to keep out of sight.

'I don't know,' Lydia said. They got to the top field, using the bleachers for cover. Allison was now at the edge of the trees, where the fields met the preserve. She was scanning them like she was looking for something, her entire body alert. She relaxed suddenly as a tall blond man came out of the trees to meet her and Stiles frowned. He was much older, closer to Noah's age by the looks of it but what made him really pay attention was the rifle the man was carrying.

'That's her father,' Lydia hissed. 'Chris Argent.' She tugged at his sleeve. 'Come on, we're going to get some answers.'

'Lydia!' Stiles protested but she wouldn't let him wriggle out of her grip.

Allison and Chris both wheeled around as they approached but neither of them made any attempt to leave, which surprised him.

'Lydia,' Allison said, her eyes flicking to her father. 'What are you doing out here?'

'I could ask the same thing,' Lydia smiled, and then turned her attention to Chris. 'Mr Argent, I presume?'

'Miss Martin,' Chris had icy blue eyes that seemed to bore into them like lasers. 'And Mr Stilinski, no doubt. Allison has told me about you both.'

'Good,' Lydia said pertly. 'Then we don't have to waste each other's time. We have some questions.'

'And so do we,' Chris replied. 'Maybe we could be of help to each other.'

'Good,' Lydia folded her arms. 'Who is the alpha? We know it's not a man and therefore not Ennis.'

The Argents exchanged a look and then Allison spoke.

'We can't tell you that,' she replied. 'It's a family thing.'

'Then it's an Argent,' Lydia smiled, but her face was tight with anger. 'One of yours was bitten.'

'There was a situation,' Chris said carefully. 'And yes, one of us was bitten. That's all we're willing to say right now.'

'Why lie though?' Stiles asked.

'Because we know how this looks,' Chris snorted. 'And right now, if other hunting factions realised that this had happened, it would severely impact on our standing with the Council. We

have people we report to and I will not let the reckless actions of some of my family put my daughter at risk. It was bad enough that my wife was killed.'

'Please.' Allison pleaded and when they looked at her, her brown eyes were wet. 'I know how this looks but I didn't lie. We want a truce and we want to work with your pack. The alpha...she...' She broke off and started crying and Chris sighed and moved to hold her.

'This has been very trying for both of us.' he said to them over Allison's head. 'Losing Victoria was hell on us both.'

'She was also bitten?' Lydia asked, her face showing the horror she was feeling clearly. Stiles wondered what would warrant that action when Allison sniffled loudly and nodded.

'She followed the Code.' she choked out.

'Oh.' Lydia's shift to pity caught Stiles by surprise. 'I'm so sorry.'

'We've been tracking the alpha as best we can.' Chris said. 'But the preserve is huge. Now she's killed, we know that she's beyond help. We just want to put her down before she hurts anyone else.'

'Then you need to talk to Laura.' Lydia said. 'And you need to be straight with her.'

'Can you set up a meeting?' Chris finally asked, sighing like he carried the world on his shoulders. 'I realise subterfuge probably wasn't the best way to go about things but we really do need your help.'

'I'll ask her.' Lydia tossed her hair over her shoulder. 'Fortunately, I'm the person she'll most likely listen to.'

'So I've heard.' Chris smiled. 'I'm surprised you're not her emissary.'

'I'm not a druid.' Lydia replied. 'Or anything else that would suffice.' She looked at Allison. 'You really need to let her sleep though. She's exhausted.'

'I'm fine.' Allison insisted, breaking out of her father's hold and wiping her eyes. 'I'm in this too and I won't let him patrol alone.' Her chin lifted defiantly. 'I won't lose anyone else.'

'Okay.' Lydia nodded. 'We're having dinner tonight at the pack house. There's lots of things we'll be discussing.' She turned on her heel and strode off, leaving Stiles to scramble after her. 'Bring dessert. Lots of it.'

-

Laura dropped Peter off at the shop and then took them to school. When she got there, she turned and looked sternly at them both.

'Not a word to anyone yet.' she said. 'I mean it.'

'Scout's honour.' Derek said and Cora snickered and bumped him, shoving him out the door.

'And come home right after practice.' Laura called through the window. She drove off, tyres squealing and Cora huffed.

'She's pissed.' she said and Derek nodded.

'Yeah.' He nudged her along. 'We're going to be late so move your ass.'

'You just want to find Stiles.' Cora said with a wicked grin. 'Like you two didn't make out enough yesterday.'

'Shut up.' Derek shoved her playfully and she mock-snarled at him.

'So what do you think is going to happen tonight?' she asked. 'Think the parentals are going to flip out when Laura gives them the big reveal?'

'God I hope not.' Derek's stomach lurched at the thought of that very thing happening and him being banned from seeing Stiles. He'd gotten far too attached in such a short time but he was not going to give up without a fight, that was for sure.

Once inside he scented the air, grumbling when he couldn't pick up Stiles' scent in the miasma of teenage hormones and various shades of Axe.

'Text him, asshole.' Cora muttered, rolling her eyes at him. 'I'm going to the canteen.'

She left him fumbling with his phone, sighing when he saw he had several messages asking where he was. He was just tapping out a message when he felt the hairs on the back of his neck go up and turned to see Stiles and Lydia coming towards him. Stiles' entire face lit up and he bounded over. Derek returned his smile, catching him around the waist and reeling him in, pressing his face into Stiles' neck and inhaling greedily.

'I'm sorry.' He waved his phone at him.

'It's okay, I heard you had super secret wolfy business.' Stiles grinned. 'Did you have fun?'

'Not exactly.' Derek snorted. 'You'll find out more later.'

'OKay.' Stiles looked at him through his lashes, so obvious as to be completely transparent. 'So, you ever going to kiss me or do I have to throw myself at you?'

Derek grinned, ignoring Lydia's lament in the background and raised both hands to cup Stiles jaw.

'Hi.' he said brightly and Stiles' warm amber eyes seemed to glow like a wolf's. He started to reply but Derek got there first, their lips locking before he tilted his head slightly and licked over Stiles' mouth, bold in his intent. Stiles made a very gratifying little sound and opened his mouth for him and their tongues brushed for all of a second before...

'Detention!' Harris bellowed in their ears. 'Both of you!'

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'They're going to find out.' Allison said, trudging through the trees. She hadn't been lying when she said she was exhausted. Two nights of constant patrol was hard on the complexion and the soul.

'We need to try and buy enough time to catch her first.' Chris said. He was equally tired, Allison could see it. She'd hoped he'd catch up on his sleep the night she'd had the sleepover with Lydia, Jackson and Danny but knowing him, he'd probably been out patrolling.

'She's smart.' she sighed. 'I don't think it's going to be easy.'

She stopped when she realised that Chris wasn't beside her. He was back a few steps, his head hanging and rubbing at the bridge of his nose. When he looked up, the grief was deeply etched into

his face.

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'For not telling you. For letting you believe a lie.'

'I don't blame you,' Allison replied. 'I blame her. She made her choices and she chose to not take the honorable way out, like Mom did. Now she's killed three more people and I don't think she'll ever stop.'

'I know,' Chris sighed heavily. 'She's always hidden that side of her well. I didn't know half the things she did.'

'Grandfather wasn't exactly innocent either,' Allison spat, anger bubbling up inside her. 'He's the reason all this happened in the first place.'

Chris immediately shushed her, his face now a mask of panic.

'You can't say anything,' he insisted. 'Not to Lydia, not to any of them. Not even aloud. You don't know who's listening. If they find out that he orchestrated being bitten because he was sick, they'll have every right to enforce their own laws and kill both of us just for being related to them.'

'I hate him,' Allison hissed. 'And I hate her too.'

'I know, baby,' Chris cupped her face and made her look at him. 'We'll fix it. I promise.'

Allison met his eyes and then nodded, letting him pull her in and holding onto him for all she was worth.

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On the bottom field, Danny jogged over to the sideline while Finstock praised Scott to the heavens behind them. He stopped and looked at how Jackson was staring into the trees.

'Babe?' He bumped Jackson's shoulder with his. 'You okay?'

'I just heard something very interesting,' Jackson's eyes were glowing the same beta gold as a wolf's but the vertical pupil and lack of sclera made it clear that he was something else altogether. Danny could even pick out the tiniest of scales starting to form around his eyes and mouth.

'What?' he asked and Jackson came back to himself, shifting back to human.

'I need to talk to my dad,' he said and Danny frowned.

'Isn't he away at that conference?' he asked.

'Not him,' Jackson turned, marching off in clear determination. 'My other dad.'

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Stiles drifted through the rest of his classes. Next to him, Scott looked forlornly at Allison's empty chair and slumped on his desk.

When the final bell rang, Stiles peeled him off the desk and dragged him out. He knew why she hadn't come back but he couldn't tell Scott that. Lydia had made that clear enough earlier after she'd completely browbeaten Harris into retracting their detention by threatening him with reports of homophobia. It had been quite spectacular to see her in action, even if her hair had started floating by itself halfway through and going white at the hairline. That had been when Derek had

grabbed her arm and dragged her off, Lydia protesting all the way into an empty classroom where he'd made her do breathing exercises until it had stopped and she'd gone back to normal.

Ah yes, Derek. His thoughts started going back to green eyes and deep easy kisses and he was definitely never going to make fun of Scott ever again for getting lovestruck brain because all he could think of was him.

He was so consumed with his thoughts that he didn't see the person he walked into until he literally walked into them.

'Oh God!' he failed in apology then since when he saw who it was that he'd nearly knocked flying. 'Miss Blake?'

'That's quite the tackle you've got there.' Miss Blake looked a little shellshocked where Scott had caught her and saved her from landing on the ground. She gave him a quick smile and straightened up. Her books were scattered everywhere and Stiles immediately crouched down and started to pick them up, stacking them and then stopping when he saw that there was one that was distinctly different. His eyes widened but before he could make out the words on the cover, it was swiftly extracted from his grip and held firmly to Miss Blake's chest.

'Thank you, Stiles.' she said, her smile too bright. 'I'd appreciate it if you could help me take those to my car.'

'Um.' He couldn't explain the sudden unease he felt, the same as he had the other day. 'I...'

'Stiles.' The sound of Derek's voice had never been more welcome. He came barreling down the corridor, taking the stack of books from Stiles and rather unceremoniously dumping them in Miss Blake's arms. 'Sorry, he's got a shift he needs to get to. Scott, why don't you make sure that Stiles leaves on time.'

His glare had Scott almost snapping to attention.

'Sure.' he said, almost falling over himself to comply. 'We've actually both got to get to work.'

Derek's fake smile got even toothier and he herded them away from her briskly, shunting them down the hall and out the door.

When they got to the jeep, he scouted around the car and even did a weird kind of sniff test before Stiles finally grabbed him and held him still long enough to ask what the hell he was doing.

'You're like a bloodhound on crack.' he said and Derek growled, his eyes flashing. Whatever it was, it was clearly making him angry enough to lose control.

'I don't like the way she smells around you.' he replied.

'Okay Cujo.' Stiles grinned. 'Hey, did either of you get a look at that book she had?'

'No.' Scott looked like a kicked puppy. 'Is this bad? What's wrong with Miss Blake?'

'Something.' Derek was glaring at the school. 'I've got to get to practice. Both of you, be fuckign careful.'

He pressed a single hard kiss to Stiles' mouth and stomped off. Stiles took the opportunity for some mild ogling and then got in the Jeep. Scott also got in and then sat and wrung his hands a couple of times.

‘So I made the lacrosse team.’ he finally said and Stiles beamed at him.

‘That’s great.’ he replied. ‘Dad’s going to be thrilled. Melissa’s going to worry, but you know that’s kind of her job.’

‘What if they go nuts about me being a wolf.’ Scott asked, his face all creased up. ‘I know Laura says they’ll be cool with it, but what if they’re not?’ He made a sad face. ‘And what if Allison finds out and she never ever wants to date me?’

Stiles thought about the dinner invite that Lydia had issued and let out a slightly hysterical giggle.

‘I really don’t know.’ he replied, completely honest. ‘I guess all we can do is wait to find out.’

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Peter heard the bell ring behind him and frowned.

‘This is an unexpected surprise.’ he said without turning around. ‘Are we speaking this week?’

‘Ha ha.’ Jackson set his backpack on the counter. ‘It’s a damn shame I got my sense of humour from you.’

‘And your ravishingly good looks.’ Peter replied with a grin. ‘And don’t forget the fashion sense.’

‘I always wondered how you and my mom hooked up.’ Jackson came to stand next to him, picking up a book from the trolley. ‘What the hell is a loup-garou?’

‘Unfortunately you did inherit her lack of linguistic prowess.’ Peter took the book back from him. ‘And not everyone goes through their experimental phase in their teens.’ He gave Jackson a searching look. ‘Now why are you visiting me? You only come around when you want something.’

‘No I don’t.’ Jackson looked at him with eyes that were the same brilliant blue as his own. Peter was always tickled by the fact that nobody had put two and two together and realised who Jackson’s real father was. They were like carbon copies of each other. It was almost like Maggie had had nothing to do with his conception apart from carrying him.

‘Yes, you do.’ he retorted. ‘Or you and Danny are having a fight and you need to bitch.’

‘I actually have something to tell you.’ Jackson replied. ‘If you’d shut the hell up for two minutes. I know it’s difficult with how in love with your own voice you are, but I think you need to try.’

Peter narrowed his eyes at him and then burst out laughing.

‘You want some tea?’ he asked. ‘Stiles is due here any minute and I’m going to try and get him to do some magic today.’

‘Lydia mentioned that.’ Jackson moved to follow him into the back room. ‘She said he’s a Spark or some bullshit like that.’

‘Not bullshit.’ Peter replied, turning the kettle on. ‘He’s actually extremely powerful. And after what I heard this morning, we are definitely going to need him.’

‘Is this about the girl that Laura found?’ Jackson asked and he nodded. ‘Maybe I should have asked to come along this morning.’

‘No.’ Peter said sternly. ‘You know the rules on kanima. If anyone finds out what you are, they

could use that against you and against us. We can never risk anyone finding out who's not pack.'

'They'd have to kill you to control me though.' Jackson pointed out. 'And you're pretty tough to kill.'

'I almost died the last time somebody tried.' Peter huffed. 'Don't tempt fate.' He tilted his head. 'Stiles just got here.'

'I know.' Jackson said with a grin. 'That Jeep makes so much damn noise you can hear it three blocks away.'

'Are you staying?' Peter asked, his hands hovering over the tea. 'Just wondering how much to make.'

'Yeah, why not.' Jackson said. 'This should be fun.'

-

Scott hung up his bag and jacket and went into the back, passing Rosalie at the reception. She smiled and waved him in and he whistled as he followed the corridor to the back storeroom. He got started on packing away the new supplies that Deaton had left there for him to log and shelve, whistling to himself. The door to the examination room had been closed which meant Deaton was in with a patient. He was just finishing putting away boxes of antiseptic wipes when Deaton came in, snapping off his gloves.

'You're early, Scott. He said and then stopped dead, his dark eyes wide.

'Yeah, Stiles gave me a ride.' Scott started and then frowned in confusion. 'Dr D? You okay?'

'No.' Deaton turned and closed the door firmly behind him. 'When the hell did you become a werewolf?'

-

'Try it.' Peter's voice was encouraging.

The bubbly feeling in Stiles' head suddenly felt like it was being squeezed into too small a space and he yelped as it peaked, his vision going blurry and white before the air felt like it was snapping like an overstretched rubber band and then everything just went quiet. He opened his eyes and then scrambled onto his chair, eyes wide when he realised that he was floating ten feet above the ground.

'What the fuck?' he blurted out and Peter sighed, resigned. He was also floating, still sitting with one leg crossed over the other. Jackson wasn't so lucky, floating right up against the ceiling with a panicked look on his face. He'd clearly not been quick enough to grab the counter and Stiles blinked in surprise when he flipped over onto his stomach and sank long claws into the ceiling plaster.

'Oh fuck me.' he squeaked, his frantic movements making his chair spin lazily in the air. 'You're a wolf too?'

'Not exactly.' Jackson hissed, from where he was making his way along the ceiling towards the mezzanine. He looked a little bit like a gecko. 'Now fix this, Stilinski.'

'I didn't mean to.' Stiles protested. 'I don't have any idea what the fuck I even did.'

'Magic, Stiles.' Peter gestured at the tea set that was bobbing around them in the air. 'This is what you are. You know it beyond a shadow of a doubt.'

'Goddammit.' Stiles was torn between panicking and being absolutely fascinated. The feeling his head was completely gone, replaced by that weird electrical buzzing in his fingers. 'What the hell is happening?'

'You just had an episode of losing control.' Peter nodded at the table between them. Oddly, Stiles' journal hadn't drifted off and was still sitting on the top. 'Your magic is a little temperamental.'

'No shit.' Stiles gripped the chair arms tightly, peering forward at the floor. 'Holy crap, we're high up.'

'Not as high as you would think.' Peter grinned as Jackson reached the mezzanine rail and scrambled over it. Weirdly, once he got his feet on the ground, whatever had happened seemed to lose its effect. He dusted himself off, threw Stiles a smug grin and started down the stairs. 'Now, I suggest we start with getting ourselves back on the ground. Can you focus enough to do that?'

'Dude, I have no idea how!' Stiles' voice went up into an octave he hadn't hit since before puberty. 'I don't even know where to start.'

'The basic tenant of a Spark is that rather than being able to use magic, you actually are magic.' Peter explained. 'Your will is what makes it work. You believe and what you need to happen will happen.'

'How?' Stiles grabbed frantically at the chair as it wobbled in mid-air. 'What in the ever loving fuck is that going to do to get us down?'

'Okay, you know what. This is getting us nowhere.' Peter said and then dropped right out of his chair. He landed effortlessly, making Stiles goggle at him.

'That's just cheating' he grumbled and Peter grinned at him, bumping shoulders with Jackson when he came to stand next to him.

'Come down and I'll try and help you focus a bit better.' he replied, blue eyes glinting. 'And be very careful with the tea set, please. It's an antique.'

Chapter 14

Stiles pulled up outside the house and sighed, faceplanting into the steering wheel in frustration and then wincing at the pain in his forehead. He was starting to think he wasn't cut out for magic. It had taken another whole hour of him trying and failing to focus enough to get the table and tea set and other floating objects before Peter finally took pity on him and muttered an incantation from one of his books and brought everything down himself. He'd sent Stiles home with a sympathetic smile and a couple of other volumes and an exhortation to practice. When Stiles had asked about it, Peter had explained that just like werewolves, Sparks needed an anchor, something to ground them and allow them to control their magic. He had also given Stiles the email address of another Spark that he knew, a woman named Erin who lived up in Washington State and who was working for another wolf pack.

He got out and went inside, listening to his father moving around the living room before he came into the hall and gave Stiles an exasperated look.

'You're late, kiddo.' He was already neatly dressed in khakis and a clean blue button down. 'Laura said eight o'clock.'

'Sorry, Peter and I got kind of caught up in something.' Stiles replied, heading for the stairs.

'Go get dressed and tell Scott to move his ass too.' Noah said. 'He's been in the shower for ages.'

Stiles snickered and jogged upstairs. Melissa was coming out of their room, looking lovely in a red dress and fastening her earrings.

'Oh good, you're here.' she smiled. 'Scott's been driving us nuts.'

'Oh?' Stiles paused in the stairs to his room.

'He's very agitated.' Melissa explained. 'You know something about that?'

'No.' Stiles hedged and felt bad for lying. He couldn't say anything though, Laura had made that much clear. She had a plan for breaking the news gently to their parents and Stiles didn't want to open his mouth and shove both feet in it.

'Okay.' Melissa started down the stairs. 'Can you at least get him out the shower? He's been in there forever.'

Stiles pondered that while she descended, glancing in the direction of the bathroom. Sighing, he stomped over and knocked loudly.

'Yo.' He leaned against the door, listening to the steady sound of water. 'Dude, you still alive in there?'

He did not expect the door to open and to be yanked inside by a frantic looking and fully shifted Scott, who slammed him against the door and growled in his face. Stiles did what he did best, flailing so hard he accidentally slapped him. Scott yowled and jumped back, his clawed hands to his nose. He looked so much like a chastised puppy that Stiles burst out laughing.

'You asshole.' He wheezed in mirth. 'What the hell are you doing?'

'Don't.' Scott whined. 'I'm fucking stuck like this!' He looked completely miserable. 'It's why

I've been hiding in here.'

Stiles got himself under control and then examined Scott carefully, grinning at his hairy face and flicking his claws until Scott pulled both hands back, his mouth turned down as he held them protectively to his chest.

'Okay,' he said. 'Let's be scientific here. What set this off? You were fine all day at school.'

'Um,' Scott looked shift. 'So I was in the shower...' He gave Stiles his version of meaningful eyebrows.

'Oh?' Stiles frowned and then realised what he was referring to. 'Dude, you wolfed out because you were jacking off?'

'Not exactly,' Scott was bright red, a very odd contrast to his wolfiness. 'It was kind of at the end?'

That was too much. Stiles broke down, leaning on the sink as he howled with laughter, pun intended.

'Oh Jesus,' He wiped his eyes. 'You got off and then you...' He waved a hand at Scott's face. Scott harrumphed and folded his arms.

'It's not that funny,' he grumbled.

'No,' Stiles crackled. 'It's hilarious.' He straightened up and then was hit out of nowhere with the question as to whether Derek would do the same. Sheer want hit him like a punch to the gut as Stiles realised he'd definitely be into that and Scott glared at him, wrinkling his nose.

'Dude,' he admonished. 'Gross. I can smell that.'

'Maybe you should keep your goddamn nose to yourself,' Stiles was blushing furiously. He took out his phone and then did a mental checklist of people he could ask. Derek was definitely out. There was no way Stiles was giving anything away by calling him. He scrolled through his contacts and then hit call. A second later Jackson answered, sounding bored.

'Didn't I see you like literally an hour ago?' he drawled and Stiles snorted at him.

'Shut up lizard boy,' He shifted his phone to his shoulder and went to turn off the water. 'I need you to help me solve a problem.'

-

Derek bolted down the stairs when he heard Peter's car. He had been going through his closet in a desperate attempt to find something that said responsible and trustworthy and no, I don't want to pin your son to the nearest surface and wreck him.

'Help,' he said, skidding to a stop in the hall as Peter walked through the front door.

'Jesus fuck,' Peter startled and clutched at his heart. 'Do not startle middle aged men.'

'Like you could even have a heart attack,' Derek snorted. 'Come help me pick something to wear.'

Peter trudged up the stairs behind him, sighing like a martyr. Once in Derek's room, he took in the scattered clothing and raised an eyebrow.

'You're serious about impressing the Sheriff?' he asked and Derek nodded, holding up a black

shirt and a white shirt.

'I want him to like me.' he replied. 'It's bad enough he's going to get the crap shocked out of him, I can't do anything that might make him stop Stiles from dating me.'

'Dating?' Peter grinned. 'Oh my. Are you going to pin the boy, nephew?'

'Only you could make that sound creepy.' Derek muttered. 'Now which one do I wear?'

'Neither.' Peter was digging through Derek's closet. 'The white will make you look like a waiter and the black will make you look like a serial killer. Here.' He handed over a forest green button down. 'This will bring out your eyes and make you look like a very respectable young man with absolutely no licentious thoughts in your head. Or your dick.'

'Thanks.' Derek beamed at him. 'Are you getting changed too? Laura said that she wants us to look as harmless as possible for the Argents.'

Peter froze in the doorway and then turned very slowly, his eyes flashing gold.

'I'm sorry, what?' he asked and Derek gave him a confused look.

'Didn't she tell you?' he asked. 'She's invited the Argents to dinner too. Or rather Lydia did at school today. She thought it would be good to get everyone under one roof so we can talk about everything. Get everyone on the same page.'

'Oh fuck.' Peter looked completely lost for words. 'Crap, I need to go shower.' He bolted down the stairs, leaving Derek still bemused as to what had just happened.

-

'Okay, again.' Stiles said, his hands on Scott's shoulders. 'Picture something that makes you feel human.'

'Okay.' Scott squeezed his eyes shut. He breathed in and out a few times and then eventually he started to shift back to human.

'Yes!' Stiles crowed. 'This is great.' He grinned at Scott. 'What did you use?'

'Allison.' Scott beamed and Stiles had to resist the urge to facepalm.

'You used the hunter to balance yourself?' he asked. 'That's dumb as hell.'

'Whatever, it worked.' Scott was moving quickly and Stiles followed him to his bedroom. 'By the way, Dr D knows.'

'Knows what?' Stiles asked and then rolled his eyes when he caught on. 'Jesus, how?'

'He used to be the Hales' emissary.' Scott frowned at his clothes. 'You think I should wear the suit?'

'Jesus, no.' Stiles huffed and started yanking things out his closet, hurling them at him. 'Dr Deaton was their emissary?'

'Not anymore, obviously.' Scott replied. 'He knew what I was the second he walked in.'

'Interesting.' Stiles stood with his hands on his hips. 'You done? Can I go get ready now? You're not the only one with parents slash guardians to impress.'

He galloped back to the bathroom and took the quickest shower in history, somewhat impressed that there was still hot water. Then he thought about what Peter had said about the house and decided to do a little experiment.

‘I really need to look good tonight.’ he said to the room. ‘I’d appreciate your help.’

The creaking noise could have been coincidence, but it was enough to make Stiles grin. He got out, towel around his waist as he went upstairs. When he got into his room though, his mouth fell open. There on his bed were a pair of black jeans, a plain white t-shirt and a blue, purple and red plaid shirt. None of them were something he remembered owning and neither were the new red chucks that rested on the floor next to the bed.

‘Damn.’ Stiles beamed. ‘I’m Cinder-fucking-ella.’

He dressed quickly, settling his pendant outside his buttoned up shirt and smiling at his reflection in the mirror as he artfully ruffled his hair.

‘Thanks.’ he said to the house and then yelped when something hit him in the back of his head. He turned around to see his journal lying on the floor. ‘Yeah I’ll take it with, don’t worry. Make sure you stay safe too. Crazy alpha out there and all.’

Downstairs everyone was waiting, piling into the cruiser. Melissa had a casserole pot on her lap and Stiles had to elbow Scott to get him to stop sniffing the air. The drive was short but with each passing tree, Stiles felt butterflies dancing in his stomach. By the time Noah pulled up outside the farmhouse, they were practically moshing. He noted the usual assortment of cars, but also noted that the black SUV that dropped off Allison at school wasn’t there yet.

‘Wow.’ Melissa was leaning forward to look at the house. ‘This is beautiful.’

‘Come on.’ Scott was already out the door, bouncing exuberantly. ‘Let’s go.’

The door opened as they got to the porch. It was Laura, looking relaxed in jeans and boots and a very soft looking red blouse.

‘Hi.’ she said, smiling at them and now Stiles knew what to look for, he could totally see the alpha in her perfect confidence as she invited them in.

They gathered in the halfway while Melissa offered the casserole and Noah the bottle of wine he’d bought.

‘Yum.’ Laura sniffed appreciatively. ‘Is that asado?’

‘Yes.’ Melissa looked surprised. ‘You know it?’

‘We have family in Mexico.’ Laura replied. ‘It’s why we all speak Spanish.’ She led the way to the living room and then relieved them of both the casserole dish and the wine. ‘Lydia’s just outside with the rest of the pack.’ She said it so casually that both Melissa and Noah paid it no attention. ‘Scott, could you give me a hand and grab some drinks?’

‘Sure.’ Scott said, following her dutifully. Stiles glanced up towards the stairs.

‘I’m going to go find Derek.’ he said and Noah and Melissa gave him a knowing grin.

‘No funny stuff.’ Laura yelled from the kitchen and he jumped.

‘You heard her.’ Noah chuckled and followed Melissa into the living room.

Stiles muttered about smartass adults as he climbed the stairs. He hadn’t seen Derek’s room yet and as he approached the next flight, Cora came out of her room.

‘Hey.’ she grinned at him. ‘What are you doing sneaking around up here?’

‘Nothing.’ Stiles avoided her eyes. ‘Just looking for your brother.’

‘Well, you know where to find him.’ Cora replied pertly and hurtled downstairs, making far more noise than Stiles thought was necessary. He got to the bottom of the stairs to the attic and smiled.

‘Derek?’ He started climbing, getting to the closed door at the top and cracking it open.

Inside was a spacious area, a bed dressed in simple dark blue at the side, a desk and some shelves crammed with trophies and books and an open closet with a trail of clothing leading to the bed. He frowned, wondering where Derek was.

Two steps into the room and he felt arms come around him from behind, scaring the crap out of him.

‘Fuck.’ He sagged in Derek’s arms. ‘You scared the shit out of me.’

‘I seem to be doing that a lot today.’ Derek was smiling against the back of his neck. ‘You are so loud I could shoot you in the dark.’

‘Whatever, Haldir.’ Stiles was delighted by the reference. ‘Anyone ever tell you that you’re a giant nerd?’

‘My sisters do that all the time.’ Derek was definitely getting in some quality nuzzling. ‘You’re not special.’

‘Fuck off.’ Stiles wriggled around so they were face to face. ‘You think I’m all kinds of special.’ His eyes lit up when he saw the pendant around Derek’s neck and playfully tugged on it. ‘You’re all out and proud now? People are going to think you’re a sap.’

‘Damn, you got me.’ Derek deadpanned and leaned in. Stiles smiled into the kiss, the butterflies circling happily. It was slow and sweet and just the right side of dirty and Stiles had to focus very hard on not getting...well, hard.

‘You know my dad’s downstairs.’ he said when they came up for air. ‘He’s got a gun.’

‘Guess I’ll have to tarnish your reputation later.’ Derek grinned and took his hand. ‘How was this afternoon?’

‘I made things float and found out Jackson turns into a giant lizard.’ Stiles muttered. ‘It’s been an interesting one.’

Downstairs they found everyone in the living room. Laura was busy introducing the betas and Stiles knew his father well enough to see that he was both intrigued but also bemused by the fact that the house was full of teenagers. He raised an eyebrow when Lydia snuck under Laura’s arm. Stiles kept his grin to himself, walking Derek over.

‘Dad.’ He smiled his most winning smile. ‘You remember Derek.’

‘Derek.’ Noah gave him a once over and seemed pleased with what he saw. Stiles had to admit that

Derek was dressed up enough to look clean cut and grown up, sure to make a positive impression. He shook Noah's hand confidently and exchanged niceties and Stiles was so happy he wanted to bounce off the walls.

'Sheriff.' He smiled, so disarming that Stiles wanted to smooch him all over again as he greeted Melissa and got a brilliant smile from her.

From there they were steered to the back porch where they could see a long trestle table set up in the garden with strings of lights illuminating it. Noah and Melissa were talking to Lydia and Boyd while Erica, Isaac and Danny set out plates and napkins and baskets of bread. Jackson came past with more wine bottles tucked under his arms and a pitcher in each hand. He winked at Stiles as he passed and Stiles grinned back. He felt like they'd bonded a little bit at the shop and in spite of Jackson's bitchy exterior he was sharp and funny and Stiles had to admit he liked him.

'Food!' Laura announced from behind them, jerking her head in the direction of the kitchen. 'You two lovebirds can go get the rest.' She was followed by Scott and Cora, both staggering under the weight of the dishes they were carrying.

'Okay.' Derek grabbed his hand, hauling him with him to the kitchen. There were a few more dishes on the table, vegetables and mashed potato and rice.

'Double carbing?' He smirked at Derek, who grinned. There was a hint of fang in it and Stiles' brain immediately went to Scott's little problem and then he was bright red and trying to think of the most unattractive things in the world.

'Nothing wrong with it.' he replied. 'We need the energy.' One dark eyebrow quirked at him and Stiles inhaled sharply.

'I'm wondering what you'd need it for?' he asked, trying desperately for coolly and flirtatious.

'I'll show you later.' Derek smiled, his eyes fixed resolutely on Stiles' mouth. He was trying to think of a snappy comeback when the doorbell rang again and there was the sound of feet pounding down the stairs.

'I've got it.' Peter yelled and they looked at each other.

'Odd.' Derek remarked, picking up a couple of bowls and going into the hall. Stiles followed him, balancing carrots and French beans and seeing Peter letting Chris and Allison into the house. He was very well dressed, his white v neck so low it was showing off an obscene amount of chest hair. Derek made a weird snorting laugh kind of sound and Peter wheeled around and gave them both the stink eye.

'Hi.' Allison was looking equally bemused. She stepped past her father and came over, glancing back at where her father and Peter were staring at each other. 'Well, this isn't awkward or anything.'

'No.' Stiles grinned and passed her the carrots.

He nudged Derek to get him moving, frowning at his adorably wrinkled nose. Once they were outside he led Allison over to Laura, now talking to Noah, Scott and Melissa, leaving Stiles to put his things on the table and join the betas, although he didn't miss the way Scott's face lit up when he saw her.

'This is going to be a very interesting evening.' Boyd said. He was sitting on the porch step at the top, Erica between his knees. Isaac and Cora were balancing on the railings and Stiles edged past to

go sit with Lydia on the swing.

‘What is he doing?’ he asked quietly, watching the formula way Allison was being introduced.

‘Wolf stuff.’ Boyd replied. ‘Matriarch to Alpha.’

‘Normally, the emissary would do it, but we don’t have one.’ Cora explained. ‘So Derek does it because he’s Laura’s Right Hand.’

‘Cool.’ Stiles was intrigued. ‘So what are you?’

‘Nothing yet.’ Cora replied. ‘I’m a Hale though so that’s pretty important.’ She wasn’t arrogant, saying it as simply as any other fact.

‘Why is being a Hale important?’ Stiles asked and they all grinned.

‘They’re special.’ Isaac smirked and Cora snickered and elbowed him.

‘Ask Derek.’ she said and Stiles turned to see him approaching.

‘I’ll be back in a second.’ he said, leaning in to nuzzle the top of Stiles’ head.

‘Okay.’ Stiles replied. Cora, however, hopped off the railing and followed her brother back to the living room, side stepping as Chris Argent came out onto the porch, going to join the others. Allison looked to be making the introductions now and Stiles wished he’d had the foresight to go with and listen in.

-

Derek got back to the kitchen, grinning when he saw Peter very obviously buried in the fridge. He made a show of sniffing the air and a growl vibrated from behind the door.

‘Don’t.’ Peter muttered. ‘Just don’t.’

‘I don’t know.’ Derek couldn’t help himself. He very seldom had the upper hand in these situations. ‘I bet Laura would love to know that you’ve been banging the Argent matriarch’s dad.’ he tilted his head back. ‘No wonder you took like five showers. His scent is very distinctive.’

Peter lifted his head and glared at him over the fridge door, his eyes flashing once.

‘You keep your damn mouth shut.’ he threatened. ‘Or...’

‘Or what?’ Derek was thoroughly enjoying himself. ‘How much is my silence worth?’

Peter narrowed his eyes at him.

‘An extra two dollars an hour.’ he said.

‘Four.’ Derek countered, folding his arms. ‘And I want to be able to borrow the Merc when I take Stiles for our first date.’

‘Oh, now you go to far nephew.’ Peter growled again.

‘It’s that or I tell.’ Derek bared his teeth at him. ‘I’ll also need your credit card.’

‘Blackmail.’ Peter huffed. ‘Fine. But not a word.’

‘Done.’ Derek beamed at him and picked up the last bowl. He left Peter stewing in the kitchen and came out to find Cora lurking at the stairs. She gave him a questioning look and he smirked and raised a finger to his lips.

Outside, Laura was now directing people to sit down and they both stood for a moment and watched her. Cora leaned into him and he put his arm around her.

‘She’s so much like Mom.’ Cora said and he could see it in every line of Laura’s face and the graceful way she took charge. Then his eyes were drawn to a lanky figure, nearly falling over the chair Scott had pulled out.

‘Ugh.’ Cora rolled her eyes and dragged him with her. ‘You two are hopeless.’

Stiles beamed at him when they got to the table. Derek smiled back taking the empty seat next to him. Across from them, Noah and Melissa gave them both a knowing smile. Derek liked them. Noah smelled like Laura did, leather and cordite and paper. Melissa was antiseptic and flowers, the squeak of rubber and snap of latex gloves. Most people hated the smell of hospitals but they had kept Peter alive and healing after the fire, even if they hadn’t known what he was. It had been the first time Derek had seen other humans taking care of someone they thought was one of their own.

At the end of the table, facing Laura, was Allison with Chris on one side and Scott on the other. Derek could smell the suspicion that seemed to swirl around Chris whenever he looked at Scott and was pleased that Laura was going to be telling them about her having to make Scott her beta. Laura was at the other head with Peter and Lydia on each side of her and the other betas facing each other in their pairs. As everyone sat down, Peter and Chris avoiding each other’s eyes, she stood up and raised her glass. It had wine in it, a very good one judging from the smell, and she looked at all of them.

‘Thank you for coming tonight.’ she said, her light eyes sweeping over them. ‘This has been a very eventful week and it’s reminded me that the only way we get through challenging times is to draw together and rely on each other.’ The double meaning of her words would be clear to Allison and Chris but also vague enough for Noah and Melissa to appreciate them. ‘So in light of that, I would like to welcome Noah, Melissa, Stiles and Scott to Beacon Hills. I hope you will prosper and grow here and that there will be peace and friendship between yours and mine.’

It wasn’t quite an official blessing, but it would do. Derek remembered something similar that Talia had said to visiting packs, although that had had more allusions to pack and the Moon. Next to him though, Stiles had parsed what Laura was saying and his smile was brilliant. His hand found Derek’s under the table and Derek squeezed, willing Stiles to feel the connection between them all.

‘Thank you, Laura.’ Noah smiled at her. ‘I have to say, so far we’ve felt very welcomed.’ His eyes darted to Stiles and his smile turned wicked. ‘Some of us more than others, maybe.’

Derek clocked the look that Chris gave them. He stared back, meeting the hunters’ eyes and waiting until Chris looked away. He may have only been a teenager still but he was Laura’s second and he took that seriously. Any threat to Stiles would be a threat to him and Chris knew it.

He turned back to find Laura watching their exchange. This time when she spoke it was sterner and there was an undercurrent of alpha in her voice.

‘We take pride in our jobs as the protectors of Beacon Hills.’ This was definitely directed at both Noah and Chris but for entirely different reasons. ‘And so I welcome the Argent Matriarch and ask her to join us in this task.’ Now she turned to Noah and Melissa. ‘And I take you both into our confidence. What I’m about to show you cannot be revealed to anyone outside this house. I have

only known you for a week Noah, but I have seen you to be a good man and someone I think we will all be able to trust. I know you'll help me protect this territory and in return I would like to extend my protection as Hale Alpha for you, Melissa and your sons and welcome Scott officially into the pack as one of my betas.'

Noah and Melissa looked torn between being incredibly touched and confused.

'Um, Derek?' Stiles leaned over and hissed in his ear. 'Is she really just going to...'

Laura smiled and shifted. She looked every bit as regal in her half shift as she did when human, her eyes blazing crimson. Across the table, Noah and Melissa let out almost identical sounds of shock, grabbing each other's hand. They both looked to Stiles and then Scott.

'I know this is a lot to take in.' Laura said, her attention still fixed on them. 'I need you both to know that we do not mean you any harm. But this is what my family are and were and our ties to this territory go beyond anything you can currently understand, although I'd like to be given the opportunity to show you.'

Noah was the first to recover, swallowing hard and then speaking.

'What are you exactly?' he asked. 'And why do my sons not seem in the slightest bit surprised by this?'

Stiles let out a meep and Derek hid a smile. Trust Noah to pick up on that. Stiles had said he was good at his job.

'We're werewolves.' Laura replied. 'All of us. Well, most of us.'

'I'm a banshee.' Lydia piped up and then nodded at Chris and Allison. 'And they're hunters. As for your sons, well that's a longer story.' She pointedly didn't mention Jackson and Derek glanced at his cousin. Jackson kept what he was very closely guarded and the pack never mentioned it to outsiders. It was another sign that Stiles was welcomed that he'd shown Stiles what he was.

'Oh really?' Noah's sharp grey eyes landed back on Stiles and Scott and Derek could see them both shrink in their chairs a little. 'Well, I'm sure we'd be very keen to hear it.'

'Absolutely.' Melissa added. She raised her glass, having emptied it during Noah's question. 'Maybe with some more wine?'

'And you?.' Noah turned to Chris and Allison. 'What the hell does she mean by hunters? What exactly do you hunt?'

Chris sighed heavily. He made a vague gesture and then leaned back in his seat.

'This is your call, Ally.' he said. 'You're the boss.'

'The boss?' Melissa exclaimed. 'But she's a child.'

'I'm old enough.' Allison told them. She met Laura's eyes. 'You have my permission to tell them everything.'

'Thank you.' Laura sat back down. 'Now I suggest we eat and you can ask us anything you want.'

The next hour was filled with conversation. Noah asked for all the wolves to shift and Laura nodded. Derek held his breath and then blew it out in relief when Noah unexpectedly burst out

laughing.

‘Teenage werewolves.’ he muttered, wiping his eyes once he’d calmed down enough to speak.
‘Jesus Christ.’

‘This is fascinating.’ Melissa was examining a beaming Erica’s claws, holding her hand and them inspecting her face. ‘I would never have suspected a thing.’

‘We stay hidden as far as we can.’ Laura said meaningfully, glancing down the table. ‘WE were a long established pack who’d never hurt any human until the day hunters murdered most of us by burning down our home.’ There was a pregnant pause before she continued. ‘Now it’s just me, Derek, Cora and Peter who are left from the original pack. Erica, Boyd and Isaac are all bitten wolves. I had permission from the High Pack to start rebuilding and I chose them because they needed it.’ Derek knew this was as much for Allison’s benefit as Noah’s.

‘You said something about Scott.’ Melissa asked, looking uneasy. ‘What exactly did you mean.’

‘Well, there’s been a situation that has arisen.’ Laura looked at Noah.

‘The murders?’ he asked. ‘They are connected?’

‘They are.’ Chris was the one who answered. ‘You asked us who we hunt? We hunt the things that the police can’t deal with.’

‘We’re not things.’ Cora growled from her side of the table, eyes glowing. ‘We’re not human but that doesn’t make us animals either.’

‘Cora.’ Laura rumbled. ‘I’m sure that they are aware of that.’

‘We are.’ Allison said, her voice perfectly assured. ‘I intend to uphold any treaties that you might make with us and treat you as allies.’

Chris had a ghost of a smile but Derek could smell the sadness underneath. He glanced at Peter, but his uncle’s face was completely neutral.

‘Your grandmother was a formidable woman.’ Laura replied.

‘She taught me nothing.’ Allison raised her chin. ‘She died before I was born. My training comes from my father and he’s instilled in me how important it is to follow the Code.’

‘What is this Code?’ Noah asked and Laura made a face.

‘It’s supposed to keep hunters from killing innocents.’ Allison looked equally unimpressed. ‘It doesn’t always work, as you can imagine.’

‘So we’ve heard.’ Jackson spoke up for the first time during the discussion. He tilted his head. ‘You haven’t been completely honest.’

There was another look exchanged between Allison and Chris, before she nodded.

‘The alpha.’ she said. ‘We know who it is.’

‘Who?’ Laura regarded them over the rim of her wineglass, eyes flickering red. Derek could smell her sudden agitation but she kept her cool.

‘You have probably made some investigations.’ Chris replied. ‘I would have.’

'I know that it's not Ennis, as you claimed.' Laura said. 'And that your father and wife are both presumably dead. I'm guessing that this alpha is the one who killed them, as well as the teenagers this week.' She gave Noah a look that screamed *listen carefully*.

'I...' Allison was flustered.

'You might as well tell us.' Jackson told her. 'I overheard you and your father this afternoon.'

'How?' Chris eyeballed him and Peter immediately leaned into his line of sight.

'None of that, Christopher.' His grin was more fang than anything else. 'He told me too.'

'Shit.' Stiles breathed next to Derek. 'This is better than Real Housewives.'

Finally Chris and Allison seemed to come to an unspoken agreement and she replied.

'Gerard Argent was a monster.' she started. 'It's the whole reason my parents broke with him so early on. I have only met him once, when I was very young, and I have never subscribed to what he's done and the crimes he's committed.'

Derek felt an odd prickle go down his spine.

'My father fell sick last year.' Chris took up the story. 'It was diagnosed as terminal. He decided that in order to survive, he would commit a truly heinous act and capture an alpha to give him the bite.'

Every wolf except for Scott looked sick. Derek's stomach twisted uncomfortably. They all knew the significance of the bite. Talia had always called it a gift. To think of a hunter using it to their own ends was repellent.

'Afterwards he planned to kill the alpha and take the power for himself.' Chris continued. He spoke calmly, but Derek could smell his anger and shame as could every other wolf. 'He took an alpha called Kali and then slaughtered her pack. Ennis was collateral damage. He came looking for Kali, presumably when he couldn't contact her, and was taken along with them.'

'Who gave Gerard the Bite?' Laura's anger was palpable.

'He forced Kali to do it.' Chris' mask cracked for the first time. 'They threatened to slit her emissary's throat in front of her if she didn't. I believe that they were...mates.'

Now Peter was standing up, his eyes gold and his fangs exposed in a roar.

'You came here knowing this!' he bellowed at Chris. 'You let me...' He bit off the rest of his words, knocking his chair over in his rush to get away from the table.

'Ouch.' Erica said. She and the other betas all looked pained and Derek couldn't blame them. He'd only known Stiles for a week and he was pretty sure he'd kill anyone that threatened him, or conversely do anything to keep him safe.

'How do you know this?' Laura snarled.

'There was a recording. My mother was there helping them.' Allison was white. 'There was an altercation. Ennis managed to break free and he attacked the hunters that were helping them. It was too late though. My aunt Kate slit the emissary's throat and Kali went mad before they could kill her. She bit my mother before she was shot. Kate was the one who took Ennis down but the

damage was already done.'

'He bit her.' It wasn't a question. Derek had never seen Laura like this before. Her claws were embedded in the table and everyone else was stunned into silence, although he was willing to bet that he was the only one that had reacted to the name *Kate*. Even now it made his blood run cold.

'My mother killed herself that night.' Allison's mouth twisted. 'Kate didn't. We've been chasing her since then, trying to limit the damage she's been causing.'

'So she's the alpha.' Laura looked at a pale Lydia. 'Jesus.'

'So the thing that killed those kids is your sister?' Noah looked every bit as furious, but he held it in well. Melissa just looked appalled.

'What is left of her.' Chris directed it at Laura. 'I'm sure you know she's feral.'

'I do.' Laura growled. 'And that makes her very dangerous.'

'She wasn't stable, even when she was human.' Chris huffed. His eyes strayed to where Peter had gone. 'Now you know, and if you'll excuse me I have an apology to make.'

He got up, strolling away into the darkness and leaving them all gaping in his wake.

'What the hell?' Laura looked at Derek and her eyes narrowed. 'What do you know?'

'Maybe not the best time.' he replied, hoping she'd get the hint.

'Here.' Allison had her purse on the table, digging through it until she could take out a photograph. 'This is Kate.' She handed it down to Scott and he passed it to Derek. He looked at it and when he saw the face of the woman who was now running rampant through Beacon Hills, he felt sick to his stomach. She hadn't called herself Argent back then and she looked a little older but it was definitely her.

'Hi there, sweetie.' She had flicked honey brown waves out of her face and smiled at him as she approached his desk. One look at her and Derek had felt like he needed a shower. *'What's your name?'*

Derek started to shake uncontrollably. He let the photograph fall to the table, everything getting fuzzy and hard to hear as panic filled him and he started to pant like a terrified animal.

'Derek?' Stiles sounded distressed. Derek felt hands on him, easing him to the ground. He hadn't realised he'd stood up and he dropped like a stone, blackness rushing up to meet him as the woman who killed Paige and his entire pack laughed her bright mocking laugh in the back of his head.

Chapter 15

‘Alright.’ Laura growled, her anger coming out in her flashing eyes and uncontained snarl. She threw Chris and Allison a furious look. ‘You two want to explain what the hell just happened?’

‘I honestly don’t know.’ Chris protested. She could hear he was telling the truth, even if his heartbeat was up, and nodded at the table.

‘Then tell me why my brother took one look at that picture and ended up having a panic attack so bad he’s practically catatonic.’ She folded her arms and fixed them with the full force of her alpha authority. ‘I want an answer. Now!’

She watched them look at each other, both of them completely lost. It wasn’t fair, demanding answers that they obviously didn’t have, but Laura hadn’t been alpha for the past six years without learning that hunters had their dirty little secrets. She glanced behind them to her betas and Erica and Boyd closed in, eyes glowing and claws out.

Derek’s attack had come so completely out of the blue that it had rattled all of them. He was upstairs now, carried there by Isaac. He and Cora were still with him, along with Stiles. She had to give it to him, he was a spunky little thing and he’d point blank refused to be cowed when she’d roared in his face for him to stay downstairs and look after his own family.

Melissa was in the living room with Scott. Danny and Jackson were with them, trying to explain why Scott had also freaked out and sprouted fangs and claws and a pair of Victorian style mutton chops. Peter was still awol and Noah had come out with a look on his face that told Laura in no uncertain terms that she had a lot of explaining to do. He was now watching everything unfold, quiet but by no means unengaged. Laura could practically hear the wheels turning.

‘I don’t have one.’ Chris stated, his voice still neutral even as his scent went haywire. ‘I have never been privy to everything Kate or Gerard did. Hell, she’s always had a habit of running off on her own to go do God knows what.’

‘You’re supposed to follow the Code!’ Laura snarled. ‘But we all know that’s bullshit, right? You expect me to believe that this is all a coincidence? My pack was murdered, burnt alive in their own home by somebody who knew what the hell they were doing. Derek’s always been shady as fuck about what happened to him and Paige and now I’m starting to fill in the pieces.’

‘I would have shot you where you stand for suggesting that Kate would do something like that a year ago.’ Chris said and then his shoulders slumped and he looked defeated. ‘Now, I wouldn’t put anything past her.’ He glanced at a white faced Allison. ‘I need to take her home. I know you are angry and you have every right to be, but I also have someone who relies on me to protect her and she’s had about enough tonight.’ He put his arm around Allison’s shoulders. ‘We can continue this tomorrow.’

‘Laura.’ It was Noah. ‘I think he’s right. Mr Argent, we will expect you at the station tomorrow morning. We can talk there. Consider it neutral ground.’

Chris looked like he wanted to protest. Instead he nodded, his mouth set in a grim line as he gently steered Allison off the porch. Laura heard them making their way around the house, Allison’s shaky breathing turning into quiet crying by the time they reached their car.

‘Make sure they leave.’ she said and Erica and Boyd nodded and followed them, melting into the

shadows with not a single sound. That left her and Noah standing looking at each other.

‘So.’ Noah started. ‘That was one hell of a thing that happened back there. It does explain a lot though.’

‘I needed to trust you before I could tell you.’ Laura replied. ‘I know this is a hell of a lot to take on and I appreciate how calm you’re being.’

‘Don’t let this fool you.’ Noah waved a hand at his face. ‘Right now, I’m still trying to get my head around it.’

‘I have some whisky in the kitchen.’ Laura offered. ‘It’s actually Peter’s but I think he’d share, considering the circumstances.’

‘Lead the way.’ Noah replied, pushing himself off the porch railing. ‘What about Derek?’

‘He’ll be okay.’ Laura glanced up, listening in briefly before she went inside. ‘He has what he needs.’

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Upstairs, Stiles was wringing his hands, looking at an expectant Cora and Isaac with trepidation.

‘Are you serious?’ he asked and Cora nodded vehemently.

‘Trust me.’ she said. ‘Laura can explain it to you later, but we need you to do this now.’

‘Okay.’ He took a deep breath and leaned down to take off his sneakers.

‘Socks too.’ Isaac said. ‘The more skin contact the better.’ He was busy doing the same to a barely conscious Derek before going to work on his shirt, easing it off and over his head.

Stiles was no stranger to what Derek was experiencing, although he’d never had a panic attack so severe that it left him completely unable to talk or move the way it seemed to have done with Derek. He did know that he was desperate to help, felt it like an almost physical need. He waited for Cora to move out the way and then crawled onto Derek’s bed next to him.

‘Get in close.’ Cora instructed, and then crawled up on Derek’s other side. She was now also barefoot and had stripped down to her tank top. She wrapped her arms around her brother and snuggled in close, spooning him. Stiles copied her action, wedging himself around Derek so Derek’s head was on his shoulder and his head was tucked up under Stiles’ chin. He put his other arm around Derek’s shoulders and held on tightly, willing him to come back. He could hear Derek’s breathing, shallow and frantic, and feel how much he was shaking.

‘Has this ever happened before?’ he asked and Cora looked miserable.

‘He used to have them after the fire.’ she replied. ‘But it started when Paige was murdered.’

‘I don’t know that much about Paige.’ Stiles frowned, his stomach lurching. ‘People thought she was his girlfriend or something?’

‘No.’ Cora moved a little to make room for Isaac. He squished himself behind her in turn and settled in, the four of them barely fitting on Derek’s double bed. ‘She was his best friend. When she died, he started doing this. It got worse and worse and when the fire happened, he was like this for a week. Laura had to take us both out of school for a year and she sent Derek to therapy and he

learned to get a handle on it. This is the first time it's happened in ages.'

'Amd seeing the picture of Allison's aunt triggered it?' Stiles started thinking.

'Yeah.' Cora's dark eyes met his over Derek's shoulder. 'Really fucking coincidental, huh?'

'You think she set the fire?' Stiles asked and her eyes flashed gold.

'We always knew it was hunters.' she replied. 'But that's not exactly something you can go shouting about. Laura and Peter were always very careful to talk where I couldn't hear them but they've suspected something didn't add up for a long time. I'm guessing that whoever Kate Argent is, she fills in the gap.'

Stiles lay there and pondered. He was always at his sharpest when he had something to really focus on and it was a welcome distraction but now he found that that wasn't his driving motivation. Instead he was being driven by a righteous anger that something could make Derek feel like this, so hopeless and distressed that he shut down completely. He squeezed his eyes shut and pulled Derek even closer.

'Um.' Isaac said to Cora. 'What's that?'

'Shit.' Stiles felt Cora move back. 'Stiles, what are you doing?'

Stiles opened his eyes, gasping when he saw that he and Derek were surrounded by an envelope of soft blue light. He heard Cora yelling for Laura and felt her and Isaac scatter off the bed, but he was locked in. He lay back down, his eyes fixed on Derek's face, watching the emotions play out across his features and under his closed eyelids.

The door to Derek's room flew open and Laura was there, Noah right behind her.

'Derek!' Laura came to kneel at the side of the bed, her face creased up with worry. 'Stiles, what are you doing?'

'I don't know!' he blurted. 'It just happened!'

There was some hissed consultation and then Noah took her place.

'Hey kiddo.' His grey eyes were wide but he didn't look upset, only somewhat alarmed. 'What's going on?'

Stiles choked off a laugh, not really knowing where to begin.

'Turns out I'm magic.' He looked at Laura and got a nod. 'There's a lot Mom didn't tell you about her.'

'Jesus.' Noah looked like he needed to take a nap for a thousand years. 'And let me guess, it's all wrapped up with the Hales?'

'Yeah.' Stiles said. 'Mom and Peter were best friends. She knew all about them being werewolves and we're pretty sure she used to bring me here when I was little. Before she died.'

'Oh.' Noah didn't have a clue, Stiles knew that just by looking at his face.

'She got Talia to take his memories before she died.' Laura said over his shoulder. 'Derek's too. They were friends, and maybe more than that.'

‘What do you mean?’ Noah asked.

‘Wolves have someone special.’ Laura replied. ‘Someone that fits them, their mate. We think that Stiles is Derek’s.’

‘Are you kidding me?’ Noah looked back at Stiles. ‘You don’t do things by halves, do you kid?’

‘That’s not all.’ Laura continued. ‘We think Claudia dying set something off. Her and Aneta were the balance for the magic in this town. Bad things started happening after she died. Derek’s story starts then, when his mate was taken away and his memories of him were stolen. It’s probably not a surprise that when you looked at Paige, she could have been Stiles’ twin sister. Even so, there wasn’t anything like that between them, probably because Derek knew deep down she wasn’t the one for him.’

‘What about Kate Argent?’ Noah asked. ‘How do you think she fits into this?’

‘I think it makes sense that maybe she was the one who killed Paige and set the fire.’ Laura replied. ‘We never had a lead before but now we have one that makes perfect sense. What her link to Derek is, I don’t know but when he’s awake, I’m going to ask him.’ She moved to put a hand on Noah’s shoulder. ‘Come downstairs. I need to talk to you about Scott and this whole mess we’re in right now.’

‘And the murders.’ Noah said, then winced. ‘Sorry, maybe not the best time.’

‘No, we need to address that too.’ Laura said. ‘We need to tell you how Scott got bitten and what that means. You’re the Sheriff of Beacon Hills so you might as well know about all the skeletons.’

Noah nodded. He got up and then leaned back down, dropping a kiss to Stiles on the head, his eyes going wide when the light curled around him, dissipating when he stood back up.

‘Magic.’ he gave a rueful snort. ‘I should have known.’

Laura herded them all out, stopping in the doorway to address Stiles.

‘Look after him.’ she said and Stiles nodded.

‘I will.’ He waited until the door was closed and they were alone before snuggling back down, pressing a kiss to Derek’s clammy forehead. ‘I won’t let anything happen to you, I promise. You’re safe with me.’

The light intensified for a minute and then Derek shifted, whimpering softly but then quietening down. His breathing started to ease, getting deep and regular and Stiles smiled. He felt an enormous sense of wellbeing suffusing him, something deep and strong and it linked them together. There was a warmth against his chest and he reached for his pendant, feeling how it had heated up under his t-shirt. He checked Derek’s and it had done the same. Then he indulged in a little shameless groping of Derek’s pectorals.

When he looked back up, Derek’s eyes were open and watching him. Stiles squeaked and tried to wriggle back, but Derek let out a low growl and caught him, his arms vice-like when he wrapped them around Stiles and buried his face in his neck. The vibrations on Stiles’ neck tickled and he snorted, trying to get away but Derek was having none of it.

‘Welcome back, big guy.’ he said. ‘You had me worried there for a bit.’

Derek said nothing, still snuffling Stiles’ neck. Eventually he stopped and started shaking again.

'Hey.' Stiles tried to soothe him, rubbing his hand along Derek's back. 'You're okay. Nobody's going to get you, not while I'm on the job.'

Derek huffed, sounding unimpressed. He pulled back and his eyes were wet.

'Almost everyone I loved in the world got taken away from me.' he said and then his voice dropped, the venom in it making Stiles blink. 'By *her*.'

Stiles froze. He knew that pushing too hard might trigger another attack but he also knew that whatever this was, Derek had been holding it in since it happened and that was a terrible burden to carry by yourself.

'Kate?' he ventured and Derek growled.

'She called herself Katie Wagner.' He shifted so he could look at Stiles. She came to school when I started freshman year. She was our substitute when our maths teacher skipped town.' He made a sour face. 'Of course now, I bet if you looked hard enough you'd find that she probably killed her too.'

'She came here pretending to be someone else? Stiles was starting to get angry again. 'She was after your family?'

'Maybe?' Derek avoided his eyes. There was definitely something else there and Stiles could feel how uncomfortable he was.

'Derek?' He kept his voice as calm as he could. 'Did she do anything to you?'

'She tried.' Derek swallowed noisily. 'I had only just turned fourteen. I didn't know what it meant at first. She used to keep me after class, talk to me, but I always felt like something was off.'

'Jesus.' Stiles clenched his hand into a fist, resting it on Derek's shoulder. 'Dude, she was trying to groom you?'

'Paige said that she was.' Derek's mouth quirked. 'She was brave like you and she didn't care who she pissed off. She got between Kate and me a couple of times, came into the classroom to get me or turned up after practice. Kate used to try and corner me once I came out, in the parking lot. The last night I saw Paige alive, Kate tried to kiss me. I was frozen, I didn't know what the hell to do and Paige just came barrelling out of nowhere.' He smiled but it was terribly sad. 'She pretty much hit Kate over the head with her bookbag. Afterwards I told her she should have used her cello case.' His face fell. 'The next night she didn't get home and they found her dead the morning after. Kate pretty much told me that she'd killed her because I wouldn't...' His voice cracked and he buried his head back in the pillow.

'She killed your best friend because you wouldn't put out?' Stiles was aghast. 'Derek! What the fuck?'

'It was all my fault.' Derek looked and sounded miserable. 'I was the reason Paige died and then after...' He was crying, tears spilling over and his voice thick. 'I know she was the one that did it. The one that killed my pack. I should have just done what she wanted.'

Stiles had no idea what to say. He did the only thing he could and took Derek's face in his hands, making him meet his eyes.

'Now you listen to me.' he said, fierce and angry. 'You are not responsible for the action of that woman. She tried to take advantage of you and hurt you, all so she could do as much damage as

possible. She's a hunter, Derek. Clearly she knew what the fuck she was doing and trust me, trying to fuck a fourteen year old and then kill the people who are closest to him when he does the only thing he can and say no, that makes her a rapist as well as a murderer!' He was so enraged that he was shaking.

Derek's mouth twisted but he didn't pull away. Instead he moved closer, his hands fisting the front of Stiles' shirt.

'You're the only person I've felt safe enough to let in.' he whispered. 'Now you'll leave.'

'No.' Stiles wrapped his arms around him tightly. 'I'm not going anywhere. And we're going to hunt that bitch and put her down. That I can absolutely promise you.'

He was so focused on Derek that he didn't notice how the walls shook, windows rattled and the light overhead flickered madly, not until Derek's door opened and his father and Laura burst back in.

'Son.' Noah looked more than a little unsettled. 'Are you alright?'

'I...' Stiles suddenly realised what was happening. 'Holy shit, is that me?'

'It is.' Laura said. 'See what I mean?' This was to Noah.

'Yeah.' Noah stared at Stiles like he was just seeing him for the first time. 'Stiles, you're not kidding around with this magic shit, are you?'

'You felt that?' Stiles looked at Laura and she nodded.

'You damn near just brought the house down.' she said. 'Didn't you feel that?'

'No.' Stiles took a deep breath and the house quietened. 'Sorry.'

He saw how Laura's eyes flicked to Derek and then remembered werewolf hearing.

'Derek.' Her voice was soft. 'Why didn't you tell us?'

'You know why.' Derek muttered from somewhere in Stiles' arms. 'I might as well have burned the house down myself.'

'She knew what we were.' Laura came to sit on the edge of the bed. 'And you did the right thing.'

'She was after me.' Derek growled and Stiles huffed.

'No, she wasn't.' Laura reached out and ruffled Derek's hair. 'She wanted to kill all of us, Bun. The fact that four of us made it out alive is a miracle. You didn't do anything to cause that.'

'Jesus.' Noah scrubbed a hand over his face. 'What a fucking mess.'

'I think we need to call it a night.' Laura said. 'You should go home, Noah. Like you said, we can pick this up tomorrow.'

Derek made a plaintive whining noise at that and clung on to Stiles like a burr.

'Um.' Stiles gave Noah his best puppy eyes. 'Can I stay?'

'He should.' Laura replied. 'And Scott. They've both had a rough night. Scott needs to be around

pack for a while.'

'Okay.' Noah gave Stiles a stern look. 'No shenanigans, though.'

'I'll keep an eye on him.' Laura promised. 'And Scott will be safer here tonight. He still needs to learn how to control himself so being near his alpha is a priority right now.'

Noah pinched the bridge of his nose and nodded.

'In that case, I defer to the expert.' His smile was wry. 'I'll see you in the morning, kiddo.'

He left and Laura got up.

'Stay with him.' she said to Stiles. 'You're helping.'

Stiles watched her leave and settled back down.

'See.' He kissed the closest eyebrow. 'You're stuck with me.'

The possessive growl told him all he needed to know about what Derek thought of that.

-

Lydia sighed and tucked her feet under her.

'It's a lot to get to grips with.' she said and Melissa huffed. She had Scott tucked under one arm, looking the very image of a mama bear.

'I'm grateful.' she replied. 'Don't get me wrong. I know he wouldn't be here if Laura hadn't bitten him. It's just, I'm his mother.'

'I know.' Lydia replied. She glanced over at the betas, all sprawled on the floor and the other chairs. 'Better than you think.'

'Lydia's basically our mom.' Isaac grinned. 'And if you're in on the pack, you can be our mom too.' He looked unfeasibly excited and Lydia sighed.

'Not everybody can be your mom.' she said and the betas all whined.

'But Melissa smells good.' Isaac protested.

'And she makes amazing food.' Boyd added.

'And she's fierce as fuck.' Erica finished with a broad grin. 'And I need a strong Latina role model.'

'Sorry.' Lydia smirked at Melissa's dumbstruck expression. 'Looks like you're being adopted.'

'I agree with this decision.' Danny laughed. 'I can't keep being the only human around here.'

'An awesome human though.' Jackson grumbled, snorting when Danny leaned down from his chair and kissed him.

'Stiles is human.' Melissa said and they all cackled.

'Stiles is so not human.' Jackson told her. 'He made the entire shop float this afternoon.' That made Melissa's mouth fall open again and Lydia was anticipating another round of

explanations when Laura walked back in, Noah behind her. He crossed over to Melissa and smiled at her and Scott.

'I'm taking your mom home.' he said to him. 'I think we could all use a good night's sleep.'

'And me?' Scott asked, his eyes still flickering gold on and off like broken traffic light.

'You're staying here.' Noah said, his eyes meeting Melissa's. There was a moment of silent conversation going on and then she nodded.

'He'll be safe.' Laura said to her. 'I promise. Now he's one of mine, I would die to protect him just like I would the others.'

That was obviously the right thing to say because Melissa visibly relaxed and then sighed deeply. She kissed her son's forehead.

'Take me home.' She got up, dislodging a protesting Scott. 'I need to take a couple of pills and sleep for a hundred years.'

Noah chuckled. Laura escorted them out, leaving Lydia to raise an eyebrow at the betas.

'You know what this means.' she said, resisting the urge to roll her eyes at their delighted faces. Isaac was already rolling Scott onto his feet.

'Puppy pile.' He declared. 'You're going to love this.'

'I am?' Scott didn't resist as he was manhandled out the room, the others in tow. Lydia leaned over to grab the wine bottle and refill her glass, listening to them charge up the stairs like a herd of elephants. Even Jackson had dropped his usual too-cool-for-school attitude in the face of a puppy pile.

She leaned her head on one hand, listening to Laura talking to Noha and Melissa in a low voice at the front door. The sound of the cruiser signalled her return and she came to perch on the arm of the chair and Lydia took the opportunity to rest her head on Laura's thigh. Laura hummed and threaded her fingers through her hair and Lydia closed her eyes and soaked in the affection of her mate.

'That went well, don't you think?' she asked and Laura groaned.

'If by well, you mean we freaked out the new sheriff, told his wife that I turned her son into a werewolf without permission and revealed that his son is magical and that his wife hid that fact from him their entire life together, then yeah. Not to mention that it turns out that the bitch busy tearing her way through the local population tried to seduce my underage brother and then murdered his best friend and torched my pack when he wouldn't have sex with her. Oh, and her brother and niece are in town to hunt her because she didn't have the decency to kill herself when she got bitten by an alpha that she'd helped kidnap to save her terminally ill father's life. That about cover it?'

'When you say it like that, it sounds like a bad thing.' Lydia smiled up at her. 'You're forgetting that you also managed to get yourself a new beta, who's currently being cuddled to death by our emotionally needy children.'

'Fuck.' Laura took the wine from her and drained it. 'It's times like this I really wish I could get drunk.'

‘Peter probably does too.’ Lydia said and then frowned. ‘Has he come back yet?’

‘Nope.’ Laura replied. ‘He hasn’t.’

-

Peter ran until his legs burned and his chest was tight and then he ran some more. He knew where he was going so he didn’t really pay too much attention until he got to the clearing and then skidded to a stop, his nostrils flaring at the scent of terror that filled the air.

He stood, his eyes sweeping over the massive stump of the Nemeton until he spotted the huddled shape. She was hysterical, crying in great jagged gasps and he moved slowly, approaching her as he would a frightened animal. She saw him and shrank in on herself even more, her dark hair stuck to her pale tear-streaked face.

‘It’s okay.’ Peter knelt and held out his hands. ‘I’m not going to hurt you.’ She stank of fear and pain and blood. When he glanced down he could see her bare feet were torn. He extended one hand towards her and her dark eyes tracked the movement, wide and staring.

‘Who are you?’ she whispered, her voice scratchy. Peter had no doubt that this was their missing girl and turned his hand palm up.

‘My name’s Peter.’ he replied. ‘Are you Caitlin? Everyone’s been looking for you.’

Caitlin’s face crumpled.

‘She took Emily.’ Her tears tracked clean streaks down her cheeks. ‘Where is she?’

Peter didn’t want to scare her, but he couldn’t lie either.

‘Let’s get you home.’ he said gently. ‘Then we can talk about her.’

‘She’s dead, isn’t she?’ Caitlin asked and when he didn’t answer she sniffled and threw herself into his arms. Peter caught her easily, cradling her as she sobbed into his shoulder.

‘I’m going to take you home.’ he murmured into her tangled hair. ‘Just hang on.’

Caitlin didn’t resist when he got to his feet, her weight barely anything to him as he headed back the way he’d come. He considered taking her to the farmhouse and then decided that was probably a bad idea. With that in mind, he turned in a slightly different direction and started for the Stilinski house.

-

Stiles turned the light off and walked back to the bed. Derek had finally felt good enough to get up and get changed. He’d lent Stiles an old t-shirt and a pair of sweats and they’d done the back to back changing thing, Stiles’ heart pounding at the thought of Derek’s bare skin. But as much as he wanted to, he knew that pushing anything tonight would not be a good idea. Derek needed to feel safe and Stiles was determined not to get his sticky, lustful thoughts all over him.

‘You know you just said that out loud, right?’ Derek asked, poised to get into bed with the covers in one hand.

‘Oh crap.’ Stiles went red. ‘Shit, sorry dude.’

‘It’s okay.’ Derek got into bed and then looked at him. ‘Not tonight. But yeah, you’re not the only

one who wants that.'

'Really?' Stiles perked up and then basically threw himself in next to him. 'Like actual sexytimes?'

'Only if you promise to never call it sexytimes.' Derek said seriously. 'Ever.'

'Okay.' Stiles grinned and snuggled in next to him. 'Although you'll have to do the driving.'

'Um.' Derek frowned at him. 'You know I'm a virgin right? I wasn't kidding when I said you're the first person I've let in.'

'I thought you meant the other stuff.' Stiles said. 'The grrr stuff.'

'Well, that too.' Derek looked away. 'I haven't ever trusted anyone enough to let them get that close physically either.'

Stiles thought about that for all of a minute and then beamed at him.

'Dude.' He was utterly enchanted. 'We can totally learn together.'

'You never...?' Derek let the question hang and Stiles hook his head.

'Not for lack of trying.' he sighed. 'But getting laid when you're my kind of trouble is surprisingly difficult.'

Derek looked at him, the corners of his mouth tilting up.

'I like your kind of trouble.' he said. 'I like you. A lot.'

Stiles was pretty sure his insides were melting. He could feel how his cheeks were starting to ache from smiling.

'I like you too.' he replied. 'Like, a buttload.'

Derek snorted and then was pulling Stiles in so they were cuddled up together.

'We can talk about butt stuff later.' he said and Stiles made an embarrassingly high pitched noise.

'Oh my God.' he breathed. 'I have so many ideas.'

Derek huffed and kissed him on the nose.

'So do I.' he replied and this time there was a wicked edge to his smile. 'Wolves like licking.'

'Fuck.' Stiles had to squeeze his eyes closed and will his burgeoning erection into submission. 'If I wake up humping you, please forgive me.'

'Hmm.' Derek was now close enough that when he flashed his eyes gold, it actually blinded Stiles for a second. 'Maybe I'll just hump you back.'

Stiles buried his face in Derek's shoulder and screamed. Derek chuckled and then stopped, clearly listening.

'Laura just told us to go the fuck to sleep.' he said and lay down, still smiling.

'Got to listen to the alpha.' Stiles leaned in hopefully, his breath catching when Derek leaned in and kissed him, feather light.

'I'm glad you're here.' he whispered and Stiles groped for his hand, tangling their fingers together.

'Me too.' he whispered back.

-

'God, they're so stinking cute.' Erica snickered. She was on one of the spare mattresses with Boyd. Foam of course, because blow up ones never lasted when you had claws.

'Shut up.' Jackson grumbled from the other side of the bed. He and Danny had the other mattress, while Cora and Isaac had Scott sandwiched between them. 'Some of us are trying to sleep.'

'Yeah.' Cora snorted from the bed. 'I also don't need to know about my brother wanting to bone Stiles, thank you.'

'Ew.' Scott sounded like he was muffled. Probably because he was buried somewhere in the region of Isaac's armpit. 'Gross.'

'Jesus fuck!' Laura bellowed from across the hall. 'When I said go the fuck to sleep, I meant all of you!'

'Busted.' Boyd chuckled and they all threw their pillows at him.

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'Christ.' Noah sat up and rubbed his eyes. They had just settled down on the couch, TV going in the background and a bottle of whiskey open on the coffee table. He hadn't realised how exhausted they both were until there was a thump on the door and he'd been woken from a sound sleep. Next to him, Melissa mumbled and cracked an eye open.

'You get it.' she yawned. 'It might be burglars.'

'Burglars who knock?' Noah asked, stretching as he got up and stumbling into the hall. When he opened the door, he was astonished to see Peter standing there with a young woman in his arms. She was filthy and crying, a series of hiccoughed noises that immediately tugged at him.

'Hi.' Peter's eyes were glowing gold. 'I found our missing girl.'

Chapter 16

Saturday morning saw Laura pulling into the hospital parking lot and getting out of her cruiser to find Noah already waiting for her in the entrance lobby. He looked as rough as anyone who'd spent the evening getting a traumatised girl to hospital and then informing her parents, who'd been terribly grateful and desperate by turns.

He'd called her after Peter had turned up at the Stilinski house with Caitlin in his arms. Melissa had given her medical attention while he and Peter had decided it was better if they said she'd stumbled out of the preserve into their yard to avoid any awkward questions. She'd gotten up immediately and thrown on her uniform, leaving Lydia curled up in their bed and resigning herself to another twenty-four shift. Thankfully her wolf stamina meant she could go for far longer than a human and she felt for Noah and how he was clearly exhausted.

'Hey Boss.' She fell into step beside him. 'I didn't find much.' Noah had sent her out to go check where Peter had found Caitlin. The Nemeton had given nothing away apart from the smell of the girl. There were no tracks leading to or from the stump so it was a good assumption that she'd been carried there. Her feet were cut up and there was dirt and blood under her fingernails according to Noah and the texts that Peter had sent her. He was convinced there was magic afoot, especially after the ritual murder of Caitlin's girlfriend and he'd gone to the shop to go dig through his books in search of answers.

Noah nodded brusquely, holding the door for her.

'I'm not really sure about what I'm getting into here,' he said to her in a low voice. 'You lead on this.'

Laura gave him a reassuring smile. He was doing great for someone who'd been tipped head first into the supernatural just the night before.

'I got this,' she said, slowing as they approached the emergency desk. 'Look. I know you've got a lot to deal with here, but treat it like any other case. We do the same things, make it all official. The only difference is that we have a little advantage.' She grinned and tapped her nose.

Noah gave her a look like he was about to tell her off for being a smartass, then shook his head at her.

'After you,' he made an expansive gesture, reeking of sarcasm, and Laura's grin grew. Things were going to be okay.

Inside the room, Caitlin lay in the hospital bed. She was hooked up to a drip, dehydrated according to the emergency doctor's initial report. Apart from that and her superficial injuries caused by being out in the preserve, she seemed to be in reasonable health and there was no sign of physical trauma. She smelled clean and sanitised, antiseptic and the chemical tang of drugs almost overwhelming her natural odour. Underneath that though, Laura could smell the traces of terror on her. Whatever had happened to Caitlin, it had clearly scared her out of her mind.

Caitlin's mother Audrey was sitting next to her daughter's bed, holding her hand. She looked at them with teary eyes and tried to smile. Laura heard Noah close the door behind her, going to Audrey and putting a sympathetic hand on her shoulder.

This wasn't going to be easy.

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Stiles snuffled into the pillow and then stretched, enjoying the pull in his muscles. He was warm, so warm, and it took him a moment to remember where he was and the night's events. He glanced over his shoulder to see a shock of inky black hair and realised that Derek had slept all pressed up along his back with his nose in Stiles' neck. One of his legs was between both of Stiles' and that led him to another discovery, notably that male teenage werewolves were just as prone to happy dick in the morning as their human counterparts. His eyes went wide as he jolted all the way into awareness, blushing furiously because Derek's physical perfection seemed to be replicated by the girthy and extremely hard length pressed into the crack of his ass.

It was undeniably the hottest thing that had ever happened to him and Stiles lamented the fact that Derek was asleep and that Stiles was way too chicken to grind back against him and get things started. Also, was it even appropriate to grind on your unsuspecting and emotionally compromised boyfriend at some ungodly hour in the morning.

The strong arm around his waist tightened and suddenly Stiles was a lot more acquainted with Derek's cock that he'd just been. He squeaked in surprise and then blushed even harder when Derek let out a low growl that vibrated all the way through him.

'You know you said that out loud, right?' He sounded gloriously sleepy. 'And if you want my opinion, yeah it is.'

Stiles stilled, then wriggled furiously until they were nose to nose. It meant that he didn't have Derek's cock against his ass anymore, but this new position was good for a whole new kind of friction and, oh look, now his penis had decided to get in the game. He looked into hazy green eyes, the sun hitting them just right to turn them luminous and inhaled sharply as a wave of want hit him so strongly it made him breathless.

'Hi.' His mouth was dry. Derek's mouth quirked in a cocky grin.

'Hi.' he replied, shifting so their legs were completely tangled and his cock was pressing quite urgently against Stiles' hip and there was definitely a case of morning puppy breath going on but Stiles didn't give a flying fuck because Derek was looking at him like he was the sun coming up.

'So this is...awkward.' he said and Derek snorted with laughter and buried his face in Stiles' neck, warm breath washing over his skin.

'It's only awkward if you want it to be.' he murmured and that was definitely tongue Stiles was feeling dragging a wet strip up the side of his neck. He was definitely not averse to the direction this was taking, his breathing getting light and fast when Derek started sucking on his neck.

'Is this like a wolfy thing?' he asked, his voice pitching high when teeth got involved. 'Fucking hell, Derek. Are you trying to make me lose my mind?'

'I'd rather you come.' Derek lapped at his neck like he tasted amazing. 'Is that okay?'

Stiles couldn't help it. He moaned very loudly and clapped a hand over his mouth. So far he was having trouble getting his brain to catch up but then the arm around him slid lower and suddenly Derek's hand was on his ass and he wanted all kinds of things.

'Yes.' He nodded like a puppet on string. 'That's a definite green for go. All systems ready for takeoff. We have...'

'Stiles.' Derek pulled back and put a hand over his mouth, grinning so his bunny teeth were on full

display. 'You're babbling.'

Stiles narrowed his eyes at him and then very deliberately licked Derek's palm. He'd expected Derek to react by pulling away, but instead his eyes flashed gold and he went from looking amused to looking like he wanted to eat Stiles. He bared teeth that were a little too sharp, pulled his hand away and attacked Stiles' mouth. Stiles barely had a chance to react before Derek's tongue was in his mouth and it was super gross but also incredibly awesome and he quickly abandoned all thoughts of dental hygiene in favour of kissing back like there was no tomorrow.

Derek growled into his mouth and his other hand wormed its way under Stiles so he had both hands on his ass, rolling them over so he was on his back and Stiles was sprawled over him. They kissed for a while, both of them graceless and sloppy until Stiles' body demanded more and he instinctively rolled his hips. That made them break apart, panting and looking at each other with startled eyes.

'Dude.' Stiles breathed, smiling broadly. 'That felt awesome!'

'Do it again.' Derek urged and so he did. This time though, Derek thrust upwards to meet him and Stiles nearly went cross eyed with how good it felt. The friction between them was amazing, the thin cloth of their respective boxers already damp. He bit his lip, wanting to ask Derek if they could go a step further but Derek beat him to it, sliding his hands down the back of Stiles' pants and pulling him in hard.

'Oh, fuck me.' Stiles had to throw out a hand to brace himself. His hips were moving of their own volition and Derek seemed just as helpless, whining high in his throat with every move against each other. His eyes were flickering again and he was dragging in deep greedy breaths, looking positively drugged on what was obviously the smell of them both.

'Come on.' he growled. 'You can go faster.'

'I intend to, just...' Stiles held himself up and shoved violently at his boxers. Derek saw what he was doing and then he was a blur of movement and there was the very distinctive sound of ripping fabric, the remains of his boxers going sailing past Stiles' head. That left him very naked and Stiles goggled at him.

'Jesus.' He ran a hand down Derek's abs, which were flexing in a very distracting way.

'Jesus, nothing.' Derek muttered and then Stiles' boxers were being ripped as well and that was a whole lot better. He peered down between them, getting an unashamed eyeful. He was so busy looking at them both, he wasn't really paying attention to how Derek was reaching over until he heard the distinctive click of a bottle cap and looked back up to see that Derek had a tube of lube and a determined expression.

'Move.' He shoved Stiles onto his side and then his hand was around both of them and it suddenly felt a thousand times better. It was a little rougher than he usually did it, but it felt incredible. Derek's cock was a silky warm slide against his and this was not going to last long at all. He arched his back, thrusting into the circle of Derek's hand and Derek caught him behind the neck with his free one and kissed him, deep and wet and messy. The musk in the air was strong enough now that even Stiles could smell them and the tiny part of his brain still vaguely capable of cognitive thought wondered how amazing it must smell to Derek's wolf nose.

They broke apart, saliva strings still connecting them. Derek's eyes were completely gold and Stiles smiled at him, diving right back in again. Everything inside him seemed to be lighting up and he felt it like a crackle of static electricity running through his fingers as he pulled Derek in

close, digging his fingers into his shoulders and fucking Derek's hand faster and faster.

'God, Stiles...' Derek's dark brows were drawn down, his face all scrunched up in pleasure. He had his hands on Stiles' ass again and his wet fingers slid in and in until they bumped over Stiles' entrance and that thought was so hot that it kicked him right off the edge and into an orgasm stronger than any he'd had before. His whole body shook as he came, crying out into Derek's mouth with his eyes squeezed shut while sparks set off in his brain. Something inside him snapped and for a brief perfect moment, Stiles felt like he was floating. He opened his eyes in time to see Derek bite his lip so hard it bled to stop himself from roaring, coming white over his hand and Stiles' dick. The sharp smell of come hit Stiles hard and he fell back onto the bed, battling to catch his breath.

Next to him, Derek was breathing like he'd just played a whole eighty minutes, smiling giddily at Stiles.

'Guess we can put a check next to sexual compatibility.' he said, his hair in his eyes and his face all sweaty. 'Also you're glowing.'

'What?' Stiles glazed down at himself and gasped. His tattoos had lit up like neon under black light, the colours surging and flowing like water.

'They're beautiful.' Derek looked entranced by the play of light, he tentatively dragged his fingers over Stiles' arm and the tattoos seemed to follow his touch. Stiles laughed and kissed the corner of Derek's mouth, letting Derek pull him in before suddenly realising that the ceiling was a lot closer than it had been.

In fact, it was close enough to reach out and touch.

'Oh crap.' he said and whatever he'd been doing obviously broke and the bed fell back to the ground with a loud thump.

'Goddammit.' Cora roared from somewhere below them. 'Derek, I swear if you come through my ceiling, I am going to fucking kill you!'

'Shit.' Derek's shoulders were shaking with laughter. 'She'd do it too.'

Stiles started giggling, pressing kisses to every inch of Derek's face he could.

'Maybe we should do this on the ground floor.' he said. Derek smiled bright and beautiful and kissed his nose before dragging his tongue across Stiles' face and making him yelp.

'I'm glad there's going to be a next time.' he sounded oddly shy. 'I kind of went a bit wolf on you.'

'It's okay.' Stiles lay on him, chin propped on his hands and his feet kicking in the air. 'Wolfy you is hot.'

'I never...' Derek did a little half shrug thing, looking abashed. 'That's one of the reasons' I've never done anything with anyone, besides all the other shit. I trust you.'

'I trust you too.' Stiles smiled at him. 'I know you'd never hurt me and I would sure as hell never hurt you. In fact if I find that bitch, I'm going to fry her.'

'She'd hurt you.' Derek grew serious. 'She's a bad person and now she's a werewolf, she'd be much stronger than you. We do this as a pack.'

‘So I’m pack?’ Stiles asked and Derek rolled his eyes at him.

‘Of course. Did you miss all that bullshit last night?’ He nosed at Stiles. ‘Mates are always pack.’

-

Peter was starting to see double but he was loathe to give up. He’d come straight to the shop after leaving Caitlin with Noah and Melissa, needing answers. The whole clearing had reeked of magic and not the good kind and the thought that someone was stirring up things in the preserve and around the Nemeton was a very bad sign indeed. He was also still smarting after the revelation that the alpha they were hunting was Chris’ sister, something he’d failed to reveal when Peter had been with him and now he felt like an idiot all over again. He rubbed his eyes and contemplated a seventh cup of coffee and maybe a batch of danishes. The bakery would be open soon and he would need more sustenance to keep him going.

His phone beeped and Peter glanced at it. Laura had spoken to Caitlin but she hadn’t been able to remember much. She and Emily had been out camping in the preserve when suddenly their tent had been filled with bugs and Emily had freaked, running off into the night. Caitlin had tried to follow her but she’d gotten lost and that was the last thing she remembered. She didn’t even have any recollection of Peter finding her, which was probably for the best.

He sighed and got up, stopping when he heard footsteps outside the door of the shop. He recognised them well enough and he growled, anger welling up as the shape outside rang the bell.

‘Peter.’ Chris sounded resigned but also extremely unhappy. ‘Please let me in. We need to talk.’

Peter bared his fangs at the door and then pulled himself together, shifting back to fully human. He took a deep breath and forced himself to calm down as he crossed to the door, unlocking it and pulling it open to find Chris standing with two take away coffees and a bag that smelled absolutely heavenly.

‘Let’s get one thing clear.’ he said. ‘I’m only letting you in because you have danishes.’ He snatched the bag and stormed back inside. ‘Close the door behind you.’

-

Laura and Noah left the hospital and walked towards her cruiser. He’d ridden in with the ambulance so she decided to take advantage of him being a captive audience and also get some sustenance into him at the same time.

‘Let’s go get some coffee and some breakfast.’ she said, going around to the driver’s side. ‘My treat.’

Noah raised an eyebrow but said nothing until they were in the cruiser.

‘I’m guessing this is where we have that talk.’ He looked at her, his grey eyes serious. ‘About your family and my son and Scott and what it all means without having any interruptions.’

Laura nodded and gave him a sidelong smile.

‘How do you feel about breakfast burritos?’ she asked and Noah chuckled.

‘For one of those, I’d pretty much listen to anything you had to say.’ he replied.

She drove them right to the northern edge of town where there was a small hole-in-the-wall place

that was family run and had the best burritos she'd ever tasted. Noah allowed her to order for him, two breakfast specials with coffee, and they went to sit at one of the picnic tables set up in the small yard out back.

Three bites in and he gave her a searching look. Laura swallowed and wiped her mouth.

'Ask,' she said.

'You were born a werewolf?' Noah looked like he couldn't quite believe what he was saying.

'Yes,' Laura replied. 'But not all of us. Some of us are born human. Nobody knows why, but it sometimes skips. My dad was from another pack and he was human until he got the bite. Everybody has a choice. It's never given by force or without explicit consent.'

'The kids at the house last night,' Noah took a sip of coffee. 'Erica and Isaac and Boyd. You bit them?'

'I did,' Laura sighed. 'They had extenuating circumstances. Isaac was abused by his father and one night he took it too far. I saved his life. Erica was one seizure away from dying. Boyd wasn't in any physical danger, but he needed it every bit as badly. They're good kids, Boss. They stay on school and out of trouble and whatever the Argents may say, we mostly keep to ourselves.'

'I don't like the Argents being free to hunt whoever they see fit,' Noah's face hardened. 'Especially after that little revelation last night.'

'I didn't know it was her,' Laura scratched a nail on the table. 'Or what had happened. Granted I was 18 at the time and mostly involved in my own shit. We knew Derek was a mess after what happened to Paige, but he never confided in any of us. Now I get why.'

'Claudia never confided in me either apparently,' Noah frowned and his scent turned sour. 'I don't know why she thought she couldn't trust me.'

'There are still some gaps,' Laura replied. 'Peter can tell you more. I knew her but my memories have clearly been tampered with pretty badly.'

'How would she even do that?' Noah asked. 'Your mom, I mean.'

'Alpha's have the ability to remove and implant memories,' Laura explained. 'We use our claws and it's pretty powerful magic. I've never done it myself.'

'And Stiles?' Noah looked at her and she could read the fear in his face, the worry.

'Coming here woke him up,' she said. 'At least that's what we think. The Spark that he has, the magic if you will, it's always been there. Since Aneta died, things have felt out of kilter. There needs to be an emissary, it's what the Nemeton wants. My best guess, it's been waiting for Stiles for a long time, easily since my pack was killed or maybe even before. Derek's recalled things and so has Stiles, times when Claudia brought him here. They were friends when they were children and that's where their connection began. Even taking him all the way to San Francisco and removing his memories hasn't broken it. That's very powerful stuff.'

'I'm starting to see that,' Noah signalled for more coffee. 'Tell me everything you know.'

-

Stiles and Derek found the pack in the kitchen demolishing a loaf of toast and jam. Stiles went red

when Erica gave them a wolf whistle and held her hand out for a fist bump as he came to sit next to her. Across from him, Scott was looking traumatised.

‘Please Stiles.’ he pleaded. ‘Please never do that where I can hear you again.’

‘Not many places where you won’t.’ Boyd observed sagely, grinning at Derek. ‘If it’s any consolation, we’ve been subjecting Derek to it for ages now.’

‘Exactly. This is just payback.’ Derek took a gallon of milk out of the fridge, opening it and drinking straight from the bottle. Stiles knew he had it bad because he found even that wildly attractive.

‘You stink.’ Erica leaned against Stiles, smiling at him. ‘You need to shower.’

‘Keep your nose to yourself.’ Stiles told her and she giggled, rubbing her cheek against his arm and then sneezing violently.

‘It’s the magic.’ Lydia said. She had her feet resting on the edge of her chair and was drinking coffee from a mug that had the words Queen of the fucking Universe emblazoned along the side. ‘It makes their noses itch.’

‘Cool.’ Stiles grinned and took the toast Scott was offering him. ‘So how was last night?’

‘Okay, I guess.’ Scott replied, his cheeks going pink. ‘The puppy pile was good.’

‘It helps a lot.’ Isaac smiled at him. ‘It grounds you.’

‘The next thing we need to work on is your anchor.’ Cora said. ‘And get you working on your control as well. You’re a new bite so you have a lot to learn.’

‘I wish you could also teach me.’ Stiles grumbled. ‘Maybe stop the levitation.’

‘You already have an anchor, dummy.’ Lydia said, her lips curving in a knowing smile. She pointed at Derek. ‘He’s your anchor. Mates always anchor each other.’

‘She’s right.’ Cora nodded. ‘That means your anchor has also changed, Derek.’ She frowned. ‘Hang on, is that why Derek’s always had trouble with it. Stiles was his anchor and then he was suddenly taken away.’

‘Huh.’ Derek had stopped mid-gulp and was looking thoughtful. The fact that he had a milk moustache just made it even more adorable as far as Stiles was concerned. ‘That explains a lot.’

‘It does.’ Lydia was looking sympathetic. ‘Not least why you attached yourself to Paige so quickly. It also explains why you took her death so badly. It was just another anchor ripped away and then your pack...’ She trailed off, looking a little sick. ‘God, I’m so sorry. None of us even had a clue what had happened to you.’

The rest of the pack fell silent. Derek looked at his feet, not meeting their eyes and Stiles didn’t have to be a werewolf to see how uncomfortable he was. He got up and took the milk from him, putting it safely on the counter and cupped Derek’s face, looking him in the eye.

‘Remember what I said.’ He was fierce and determined. ‘Not anymore and never again.’

‘Wow.’ Scott sounded astonished. ‘Is everyone feeling that?’

‘What?’ Stiles turned and stared at how everyone was looking at their arms, where every hair was

standing on end, and then at each other as the hair on their heads started to do the same thing. They all looked like they were hooked up to a plasma ball.

‘Stiles.’ Lydia’s voice was firm. ‘Dial it back. We don’t want you blowing anything.’

‘Maybe not you.’ Derek muttered under his breath and Stiles ugly snorted.

‘Later.’ he grinned and then flinched when the light bulb overhead exploded.

-

‘Jesus.’ Peter was pacing and gesticulating wildly. ‘This is a clusterfuck, Chrstopher. If you can’t see that, you’re a moron!’

‘You think I don’t know that?’ Chris was just as angry, his colour high and his ice-blue eyes glittering in a way that Peter was trying to ignore. ‘It’s bad enough that I found out my father was not only planning to get the bite from an unwilling wolf with the help of my wife, which is tantamount to rape, but they also kidnapped not one by two law abiding alphas and murdered them, along with their packs. I wasn’t sure just how involved Kate was until she started killing. I had hoped that she’d survived and was just lying low.’

‘You said Victoria was bitten.’ Peter leaned against the counter, scrubbing a hand over his face. ‘She killed herself?’

‘Yes.’ Chris nodded. ‘She didn’t want to turn. You know how the old families are.’

‘Death by their own hand rather than be one of us.’ Peter scoffed. ‘And you wonder who the real monsters are. What about Gerard?’

Chris’ face shut down and Peter felt all the hairs on the back of his neck stand up.

‘He’s been neutralised.’ Chris said and Peter had to congratulate him on his vague wording. He decided to let it go for the time being.

‘You said Kate killed the emissary of Kali’s pack.’ He was starting to have his suspicions. ‘You know it takes a lot to kill a druid. Are you sure she was dead?’

Chris frowned.

‘Why?’ he asked and Peter knew there was something he wasn’t saying.

‘Nothing.’ He turned away, making a mental note to get hold of Deucalion. Satomi had said he hadn’t been able to find Julia Baccari’s body. ‘What did you do with them?’

‘Nothing.’ Chris said. ‘We only found out about what happened when Victoria came back. She had the recording and showed it to me. By the time we got to the warehouse and the compound, there was nothing.’

Peter nodded, thinking hard. The Nemeton was a powerful thing. A druid seeking revenge would make any number of sacrifices if it meant they would get their hands on its magic. Satomi had said it wasn’t something a druid would ever do but a woman who’d seen her mate slaughtered in front of her might throw away every sacred path she’d sworn to avenge her. He walked right past Chris, something clicking in the back of his head.

'Peter?' Chris watched him, looking confused. 'What are you doing?'

'Checking something.' Peter replied, grabbing a volume from the shelf. It was old, the binding made from fine tooled leather and he opened it, flicking through the pages to a chapter that he'd read in passing but not really paid much attention to. He scanned the page, one word leaping out at him.

Darach.

'You need to go.' he said, dashing past him to grab his jacket. 'The store is officially closed.'

'But...' Chris protested as he was bundled out of the front door, Peter right behind him. 'Peter! What the hell is going on?'

'Nothing good.' Peter growled, locking the door. 'I have to go see someone. Look, just stay out of the preserve for now. Kate is still out there and we have four dead teenagers and I am starting to think a rogue alpha may be the least of our worries.'

He left Chris looking lost on the sidewalk and got into his car, gunning the engine. He needed to talk to someone who might have a better insight.

-

Laura dropped Noah at the station and drove back to the hospital. Melissa would be on shift now and she'd promised Laura an update on Caitlin's physical condition. She was alert and lucid, if understandably distressed. They hadn't told her that Emily was dead but she'd known, Laura could tell that much. Now she wanted a chance to talk to her again and ask her some more questions and without Noah there, Caitlin would hopefully feel more comfortable.

She checked her messages again, feeling sick to her stomach as she reread Peter's message.

Was Emily a virgin?

Laura didn't ask why he was asking, but she knew it couldn't be good. Emily had been a virgin, the autopsy had confirmed that. If it was something that connected her to the ritualised way in which she had been killed, that was magic that was very dark indeed. Laura was no druid or student of magic, but she knew how serious things were when you started involving virgin sacrifices.

-

The preserve was quiet, the air clean and crisp. The pack moved through it like it was their own backyard, rough and tumble like puppies. Scott was taking the brunt of it, but Stiles knew he was having fun. He was giggling as he got shoved and roughhoused, his hair full of twigs and leaves. Erica had jumped on Boyd's back and they were now leading the others a merry chase towards the lake.

Derek was hanging back from them, Stiles' hand firmly clasped in his own. Lydia was with them, humming to herself as she jumped daintily over fallen branches.

'Do you feel it?' she asked and Stiles closed his eyes. He could feel something, the same electric buzzing just under his skin he could now recognise as his magic.

'What is it?' he asked and she smiled.

'A surprise.' she said.

'Is she always that cryptic?' Stiles looked at Derek.

'Yeah,' he replied. 'But it's nothing bad. Just something we need you to see.'

They kept walking and Stiles focused on the feeling inside him. It seemed to be tugging at him now, the buzzing starting to sound like actual words being whispered just beyond his hearing.

'Is it what I think it is?' he asked and Derek grinned, eyes flashing once.

'What do you remember?' he asked and Stiles thought about the dream and his grandmother, the huge tree behind her.

'You're taking me to see it?' he asked and Derek nodded.

'And Scott,' he said. 'It needs to know he's part of the pack.'

'I remember it in my dream,' Stiles smiled. 'It was so tall.' He saw Derek and Lydia exchanging glances. 'What?'

'It's not like that anymore,' Lydia muttered. 'Deaton chopped it down after the Hale pack was killed.'

'He didn't even ask Laura,' Derek's face turned stormy. 'I've never seen her so pissed.'

'He had no right to, that's why,' Lydia huffed. 'His connection to it broke when his alpha died.'

'Well, that sucks,' Stiles had to admit he was disappointed. He was also a little disappointed that Derek was making no attempt to pick him up and run with him, like the others. Isaac had Cora in his arms, cackling madly as he tried to catch up to Boyd. Jackson had Danny on his back, looking most out of character, and Stiles gave Derek a sidelong look and made a sad little noise.

Lydia noticed and smirked when Derek proved to be oblivious.

'Derek,' she said pointedly. He looked at her and she nodded at Stiles. 'Your boyfriend wants you to pick him up and run through the woods like they are.'

'Oh,' Derek frowned at Stiles. 'You do?'

'Just a little,' Stiles admitted and then shrieked when Derek grabbed him and through him over his shoulder. 'Not like that!'

'No?' Now Derek was smirking. 'Am I not being romantic enough?'

He made no move to put Stiles down though and he hung upside down and pouted.

'Now you're being an asshole,' he grumbled, then brightened when he realised he was in a perfect position to grab Derek's ass and squeeze. 'Actually, no. This is cool.'

Derek laughed, bright and happy.

'So glad to oblige,' he said and then started jogging, making Stiles yell every time he went over a bump.

'You dick!' He slapped the aforementioned ass. 'I take it all back.'

Derek kept laughing all the way until they caught up to the others.

'Hey Stiles.' Cora leaned down from Isaac's back and tweaked his ear. 'Sorry my brother is such an idiot.'

'It's okay, I still love him.' Stiles said without thinking. Then his brain caught up and he went scarlet. 'I mean...um. Crap.'

He didn't need to look up to know Derek's ears were probably red.

'It's okay.' Cora's smile went all toothy and wicked. 'He loves you too. He's too chicken to tell you.'

'Cora, shut up.' Derek growled.

Cora cackled and kicked Isaac like he was a pony.

'Mush, my fine steed!' she yelled in his ear and Isaac made a pained face but obeyed, his long legs carrying him away at alarming speed. There was a yelp and another cackle when they crashed into Erica and Boyd and ended up in a pile of limbs with Scott standing over them looking bemused.

'Morons.' Jackson said cheerfully, hurdling them all with seemingly little effort. 'Guess I'm in the lead.'

'Yeah.' Danny's dimples were cavernous. 'Bet we get there first.'

'Oh hell no.' Derek muttered and Stiles hung on for dear life as he sped up, regretting every decision that had led to that point. Behind him, Lydia laughed and twirled her way through the trees.

He had no idea how long they'd been running, but it was long enough for him to start feeling slightly nauseated from all the jolting. He was on the verge of telling Derek to put him down when Derek slowed and gently eased him off his shoulder. Stiles had to blink the vertigo away and then stared at the clearing in front of them. As he did, the buzzing under his skin changed into a smooth flow of sensation and he inhaled sharply when he saw the stump.

It was huge, at least ten feet across, and he felt the tug inside him turn into an exorable draw towards it. He glanced at Derek, who was watching intently.

'Go on.' he said. 'Do it.'

Stiles grinned and walked towards the Nemeton. The whispering in his head grew excited and when he was close enough to reach out, he wasn't surprised to feel the same shocky feeling like he did at his house, only magnified by about ten.

'Wow.' He was completely taken in, the deep rush of energy through him so completely alien and yet at the same time just what he'd been expecting. Memories started flooding his mind - Claudia holding him as a toddler to touch the leaves with a young Derek and a dark haired woman beside them, play chases around the trunk and hide and seek in piles of leaves, collecting acorns in small baskets and planting them throughout the preserve.

There were so many and by the time they stopped coming, Stiles was breathless and his eyes were blurry with tears. He turned to Derek and saw he was the same, wide-eyed and looking at Stiles like he was seeing him for the first time.

'Okay then.' Lydia had come to stand beside them. 'I've never seen it do that before.'

Stiles reached for Derek and was given his hand.

'Can you feel that too?' he asked and Derek nodded.

'It's you.' he replied. 'It's like it's waking up because of you.'

'That's so cool.' Stiles breathed, excited and happy and wanting to bounce with all the energy he felt being pushed through him. Derek stepped closer and wrapped both arms around him from behind.

'It likes you.' he said in Stiles' ear and Stiles held onto him and looked over his shoulder.

'That's good.' he said. 'Because I'm planning on sticking around.'

Derek squinted at him, his dimples making a rare appearance before he licked the end of Stiles' nose, making him thrash and frantically wipe off the drool.

'Gross.' he said happily. 'Down boy.'

The rest of the betas tumbled past, the wrestling well underway again and Lydia rolled her eyes, hooking her arm through Danny's when he escaped from the fray.

'It's so hard being the only normal people here.' she drawled and Danny dropped a kiss on her head.

'I don't know why you're complaining.' he replied. 'I'm the only human.'

Lydia patted his arm and then put her fingers to her lips, whistling shrilly. The writhing mass of betas stopped and they all popped their heads up, looking so much like what a hydra might that Stiles burst out laughing.

'Enough with the play fighting.' Lydia declared. 'It's time to train the newbie.'

'Just how are we doing that?' Scott asked, getting up and brushing grass off his clothes. He yelped when he turned and saw that all the betas had shifted, their wolf faces split by wide fanged grins. 'Oh crap.'

Stiles looked at his boyfriend and saw that Derek had shifted too. He reached over, prodding affectionately at his lack of eyebrows with one finger.

'So weird.' he grinned.

'So here's the thing.' Cora looked scary as hell with her wolf face on, her pointed ears poking through her dark hair. 'The game is called Chase the New Bite.'

'Oh fuck.' Scott was nearly vibrating out of his skin. He screeched when the betas feinted at him, taking off like his ass was on fire and giggling frantically as they chased him through the trees.

Derek joined them, dropping to all fours before he disappeared into the trees and Stiles shook his head and sat down on the Nemeton, patting it fondly.

'Guess we get to spend some quality time together.' he said to it and it hummed under his hand.

'Now.' Lydia sat down with Danny in the grass and took out a book from her messenger bag. 'Let's start with basic magical theory.'

Chapter 17

Stiles woke up on Monday morning absolutely ravenous and buzzing under his skin. He cracked open one eye and grinned at the sparkling motes floating around his room.

‘Good morning.’ He stretched and the house creaked in answer. He knew now it was awake, remembered talking to it and playing with it like it was a person when he was little. He lay in bed a while longer, lazily scratching at the hair on his stomach and thought about the previous day. It had been interesting, relearning his past like that and he and Derek had spent practically all day on their phones, comparing memories and laughing like idiots about the things they recalled. It had been a happy day, his mother’s face and voice so vivid in his head that for a moment it had been like she was still alive.

His alarm went off and Stiles fumbled for his phone, grinning when he saw he had messages from Derek. The last one was asking him if he wanted to study at the shop after school and Stiles smiled and tapped out a reply in the affirmative. He was about to get up when there was a knock on his door before it creaked open of its own accord, revealing Noah standing there with his hand still in the air. He eyed the door and then looked at Stiles.

‘A lot of things are making sense after Friday.’ he said and Stiles sat up, rubbing sleep from his eyes. His father was still in jeans and a navy sweatshirt but his hair was neatly combed.

‘Are you going for breakfast?’ he asked and Noah nodded.

‘You want to come along?’ he asked. ‘I can drop you and Scott off at school after.’

‘No, it’s okay.’ Stiles swung his legs over the side of his bed. ‘I’m sure you and Melissa could use a morning of normality after this weekend.’ He stood up and stretched. ‘How’s Caitlin?’

‘She’s still being sedated.’ Noah replied. ‘Laura’s hoping to get something out of her when she comes out of it but I think the shock might be too severe.’

‘Yeah, I bet.’ Stiles frowned when Noah’s phone rang. It was the police ring. ‘That can’t be good.’

‘Christ.’ Noah muttered and answered it. ‘Stilinski.’ His face changed when he heard what the person was saying and held up a hand like the person could see him. ‘Tara, slow down. What do you mean ripped to pieces?’

‘Well fuck.’ Stiles said and grabbed his phone.

-

Tara felt like she’d been put through the ringer. She wiped her mouth again, even though her stomach had been completely emptied, and took the bottle of water that Laura was holding out to her.

‘Noah’s on his way. I don’t know how the hell you can be so calm.’ she said, keeping her voice low so the deputies on call couldn’t hear her.

‘Believe me, I’m not.’ Laura was battling to keep her eyes from flashing. The stench of blood and viscera that had been exposed to the air was playing havoc with her senses. On top of that, Kate’s stink was all over the bus.

'It's a good thing he's in the know now.' Tara said. For a second her eyes turned completely black and then flicked back to her normal brown. 'We'd have a hell of a time explaining this.'

'Just another wild animal attack.' Laura sighed. 'Have you told Harley?'

'I sent her a message. The school will have to be shut down for at least a couple of days.' Tara rested the water bottle against her forehead. 'I know we agreed to keep her out of things but I'm starting to have a change of heart.'

'She's always welcome with the pack.' Laura told her. 'In fact, considering that things are going to shit right now she could probably use the company and they could use the extra protection.'

'How much do the Stilinskis know?' Tara asked.

'Nothing at the moment.' Laura replied. 'I respect your need for anonymity. You make the call.'

'All right.' Tara nodded. 'Then I think we need to tell them.'

-

'Is there anything I can do?' Melissa asked. Noah shook his head. He hadn't stopped to change, just to grab his weapon and keys.

'Maybe not kill me for dragging us to what appears to be the Californian equivalent of Sunnydale?' he asked and she made a sympathetic face and kissed him. Stiles came bounding down the stairs just as he was ready to go out the front door.

'Be careful.' He grabbed Noah and hugged him hard. Noah wrapped one arm around him and reciprocated.

'Laura's already there.' he said. 'She'll look after me.'

'Okay.' Stiles said and then tilted his head, giving Noah the oddest look. He reached up and rested his hands against Noah's cheeks for just a moment, like Claudia used to before Noah went out on shift. This time though, it was like he was being buzzed by mild static and he flinched and Stiles whipped his hands away and then stared at them, his face breaking into a broad grin.

'I can't believe it worked.' he crowed and Noah narrowed his eyes at him.

'What did you do?' he asked and Stiles preened.

'It's a protective charm.' he explained. 'I was reading Babcia's journal and found a couple, including one for people.'

'You just magicked me?' Noah looked at Melissa, who was gaping at both of them. 'How about that?'

'I know, right?' Stiles was almost vibrating with excitement. 'Now don't forget, I want all the details.'

'No.' Noah pulled on his jacket. 'And no shenanigans while I'm gone.' He included a sleepy looking Scott coming down the stairs in his stern look. 'I don't care about any superpowers, you're both going to behave.'

'Fine.' Stiles bundled him out the door. 'Now go find out what's going on.'

Noah sighed and started down the stairs, raising his eyes briefly to the sky.

‘You’ve got a lot of explaining to do, Claud.’ he said and got in the cruiser.

-

‘Oh my God, it’s leaking out the door.’ Tara looked green and Laura sympathised. Her nose wanted to pull itself back into her face just to escape the smell. They had the door to the bus closed, waiting for the CSI crew to arrive while a couple of the other deputies taped off the whole bus yard.

She wrinkled her nose, thinking about what was inside the bus. The call had come in from another driver, who’d arrived for their shift only to find that a colleague had been literally ripped to pieces inside one of the buses. Only the man’s blue uniform identified him as one of the drivers and they’d fished out an ID from a pool of gore that declared his name to be Garrison Meyers. It sounded vaguely familiar to Laura and it had only taken a quick check to realise why. She had said nothing though, preferring to keep it to herself until Noah showed up at least.

One of the things that had killed her was that the investigation of the fire and her pack’s death had been declared as nothing more than an electrical accident. Garrison Meyers had been the man who’d conducted the investigation. Why he was now driving buses was a question Laura wanted answered but the connection to Kate was far too coincidental to ignore.

She didn’t have to wait long before the cruiser pulled up and her boss got out, looking like he wanted to kick something. She waited for him to get to her before quirking an eyebrow at him.

‘Sorry.’ She made a face. ‘It’s not pretty, I should warn you now.’

‘I worked a murder beat in San Fran for years.’ Noah replied. ‘There isn’t much I haven’t seen.’

‘Maybe.’ Laura went to open the door, wincing when an arm rolled out and landed with a wet smack on the gravel. Behind them Tara made retching noises and bolted for the yard office. Noah just stared in horror at the arm and then at the slowly oozing river of blood dripping from the step.

‘Wow.’ He looked white. ‘Then again, I stand corrected.’

‘It gets worse.’ Laura nodded at his shoes. ‘You might want to grab some foot covers.’

-

‘At this rate we’re going to be lucky to graduate.’ Lydia was in a right snit on the phone. She was on her way to their house, the sound of her driving making it clear she was not obeying a single traffic law.

‘Don’t forget to pick up snacks.’ Stiles was busy with breakfast. Melissa had decided to go back to bed, not that he blamed her. Scott was on toast duty and he pulled a couple of slices out, then dropped them on the counter, his head cocked like a puppy.

‘Someone at the door.’ he announced and Stiles frowned. The pack would come in through the back, having all crashed over at the Hale house so he was wary when he went to the door, pulling it open and pleasantly surprised to see Harley on his porch. She was running her hand over the symbols and grinned at him when he cleared his throat.

‘This is some nice work.’ she said and pushed past him. ‘My mom told me to come over. We need to talk.’

-

Derek sniffed the air and shared a worried look with Cora. There was something off, an odd herbaceous scent that suffused the air. Laura had tasked them with running the border before they went to the Stilinski house. The prospect of a day off school had made the rest of the pack lazy and they were still at the house, keeping watch there.

Up ahead, Peter growled low in his throat. He’d come home from spending the whole weekend at the shop the previous night ansty and snappish, and he and Laura had taken a long time to run the border the night before. That usually meant they wanted to talk away from the rest of the pack, which could only mean something serious was going on.

‘You smell that?’ he asked and they nodded.

‘What is it?’ Cora asked and Peter’s eyes were glowing gold in his agitation.

‘Magic.’ he snarled. ‘And not the fun kind.’

The sound of a twig snapping had them all wheeling around to see Chris and Allison standing a few feet away. Derek was astonished at how quietly they had moved. Both of them were dressed in clothing that was casual enough to be overlooked but suitable for hunting and they were both armed - Chris with his rifle and Allison with a wicked looking compound bow, a quiver strapped across her back.

‘Good morning.’ Chris didn’t look happy at all. ‘I assume you heard what happened at the school.’

‘We did.’ Peter replied, his eyes still gold. ‘How did you?’

‘Radio scanner.’ Allison gave Derek and Cora a small smile. ‘Family businesses, huh?’

‘It was Kate, I’m sure.’ Chris said, lowering his rifle and looking tired. ‘We’re trying to track her.’

‘We could join forces.’ Cora suggested, shrugging when Peter glared at her. ‘What? We’re all on the same side here.’

‘I agree.’ Allison said, her tone decisive. ‘It’s ridiculous to not pool our resources.’ She gave her father a meaningful look. ‘Dad, I think you should go with Peter. Derek and Cora and I can patrol together.’

Derek frowned but then realised what she was up to. He grinned and grabbed Cora’s sleeve, tugging her along with him.

‘That’s a great idea.’ he said. ‘We’ll go with Allison and then afterwards she can come with us to Stiles’ house. We can all study and stay safe at the same time.’

‘Perfect.’ Allison beamed at him and they took off before either man could protest. A few minutes walk into the woods, Derek caught her arm and slowed.

‘We’re out of range.’ he told her and Allison let out a deep breath.

‘He’s hiding something.’ she said, her mouth turning down.

‘So is Peter.’ Cora folded her arms. ‘It’s to do with Caitlin, the girl from school. Laura knows but

she's not talking.'

'He went to see Peter on Saturday morning,' Allison looked between them. 'Then he came home in a foul mood and spent the rest of the day in the basement calling up everyone he knows and going through practically every book we have. Whatever it is, it's got him spooked.'

'Peter didn't come home from the shop until last night,' Cora's eyes flashed, her own feelings getting the better of her. 'So the question is, what is bad enough that it distracts an experienced hunter and an Alpha's second from tracking down a rogue alpha?'

'Another threat, obviously,' Allison said. 'Do either of you know anything about Emily's murder?'

'Just what was in the papers,' Derek replied. 'Laura doesn't tell us about active cases.' He thought for a moment and then grinned. 'But I'm betting that if we get Danny and Stiles together, we could find out.'

'Good idea,' Allison looked at him and her scent was tinged with guilt. 'But before that, I need to apologise. Formally.'

'Why?' Derek was confused. 'You didn't kill my friend or pack.'

'No, but I'm now the matriarch of the clan that did,' Allison lifted her chin, meeting his gaze head on. 'I am officially acknowledging the reparations I owe your pack. A truce will be yours if you want it. In the meantime, I am putting me and my father at your disposal.'

Derek was astounded. He hadn't really expected it to be something as serious as this. It was law that wounded parties would owe reparations but as far as he was aware, it wasn't usual for hunters to offer their own service as such. He looked at Cora, who shrugged again.

'She's not lying,' she offered. 'And I think we make better friends than enemies.'

Derek knew she was right. Allison was forthright and her heartbeat held steady. She reached out, neck bared in supplication and Derek wondered who had taught her that. He took her hand and then, in a move that had Cora gasping in surprise, he came close enough to rub his cheek once against Allison's. That clearly caught her off guard and she went pink, her hand flying to her cheek.

'Oh.' She looked absurdly pleased, her dimpled smile utterly delighted. 'Thank you. I know we don't deserve any consideration after what Kate did, not to mention my grandfather and mother. I appreciate you taking a chance on us and I swear we will do everything we can to help.'

'Good,' Derek returned her smile. 'Come on, the territory line runs this way.'

-

Stiles sat down at the kitchen table. Across from him, Harley looked around with interest and tapped her forefinger against her glass of orange juice. Scott was next to him, his dark eyes wide.

'You know?' He gave Stiles a frantic look.

'I do,' Harley confirmed and took a sip. 'I think you both know by now that Beacon Hills is not your ordinary town. My mom and I moved here five years ago when we got driven out of the last place we were living in. Your grandmother gave us sanctuary, even though we're not affiliated. Witches know witches though, and she let us stay and kept us safe from the hunters that were after us.'

'Holy hell.' Stiles looked at her in fascination. 'I had no idea.'

'The first thing my mom taught me was how to hide my magic. We could walk through a crowd of supernaturals and they wouldn't be able to tell anything. Here being black and a witch carries a whole other meaning than those white assholes that make pilgrimages to Salem every year and yell about how oppressed they are.' Harley replied. 'My mom took the job at the station because of Laura. Aneta introduced them. We usually don't have anything to do with werewolves, but as the Alpha she needed to sign off on Aneta's decision. She was happy for us to stay and her and my mom are good friends now, but nobody else knows. Not even her pack. It's been good though, and them working together is one of the reasons they've been able to keep the crime to a minimum, even though the Nemeton is sick.'

'This is incredible.' Stiles leaned his head on his arms. 'I actually didn't know any of this until I got here.'

'I know.' Harley smiled at them. 'I could feel you though. You're a Spark. That's very rare and you'll be very powerful once you're properly trained.'

They all turned their heads when they heard the front door open and close. Lydia came in a few moments later, stopping in surprise when she saw Harley.'

'Oh.' She smiled, her green eyes twinkling. 'It's that bad, is it?'

'Lydia.' Harley raised an eyebrow at her. 'I kind of don't want to know.'

'Well, I woke up screaming at about three o'clock this morning.' Lydia made a face. Stiles got up and lifted the coffee pot in her direction and she nodded, taking the seat next to Harley. 'You've told them?'

'Yeah.' Harley frowned at her. 'You told Laura, right? About the screaming?'

'Well, it's not an exact science, Harley.' Lydia huffed. 'I knew someone was going to die, but I never met the man. It's hard to get a clear impression if I don't know the person.'

'Hang on.' Stiles handed her a cup of coffee. 'Do you actually see them?'

'If I know the person, then yes.' Lydia replied. 'I get flashes, hear whispers. But his death was just an impression, a feeling. I could no more have predicted who it was going to be than a magic eight ball. I'm still learning.' Her mouth turned down. 'Banshees are rare and secretive. My grandmother should have been the one to teach me, if my asshole father hadn't had her committed.'

'But you know about Harley.' Stiles sat down and eyeballed them.

'Laura and I don't have secrets.' Lydia said. 'Mates just don't. It's not how it works. I know about Harley and Tara but in line with their wishes, I never talk about it.'

'Kind of like Fight Club.' Stiles grinned and then brightened. 'Oh..oh, Magic Club!'

'Stiles. No.' Harley said and sipped her juice.

‘Wow.’ Allison’s eyes were huge. ‘That’s really something.’

‘It was more impressive before it got cut down.’ Derek snorted. ‘But yeah, this is kind of the cause of a lot of problems.’

‘I’ve read about nemeta before, but this is the first one I’ve seen.’ Allison took a few steps closer and then retreated. ‘Sometimes I wish I could pick up on this stuff better, but I have zero ability. I can’t even use mountain ash.’

‘You can use that though.’ Cora was eyeing her bow. ‘That’s really cool.’

‘It is.’ Allison beamed at her. ‘Have you ever tried. I bet with your enhanced physicality you’d be really good at it.’

‘No, but maybe.’ Cora was smiling tentatively at her.

‘What about you?’ Allison asked Derek. He snorted and flicked out his claws.

‘I have my own.’ he replied and then lifted his head as Peter’s howl echoed through the air.

‘They’ve found something.’ Cora said and then took off. He followed, slowing a little for Allison to keep up. They ran through the trees, following the sound of Peter’s call until they were closer to the border by the southern side of the preserve. There was a hollow and they found Chris and Peter at the bottom. The hollow was filled with dead leaves and there was a suspicious looking lump at their feet. Derek could smell the blood and death immediately.

‘Shit.’ He knelt down and peered at them. ‘Another one?’

‘He’s young.’ Peter crouched and wiped away some dead leaves to reveal a young man’s face. He was deathly pale, his dark hair matted to his forehead with blood. ‘Someone hit him hard enough to crack his skull open.’

‘I’m calling it it.’ Chris sighed, taking out his phone. ‘Noah or Laura?’

‘Either.’ Peter nimbly leaped up the side of the hollow. ‘You kids need to get out of here.’

‘Do you know who it is?’ Cora asked and he shook his head.

‘I’m sure we’ll find out soon. Now get going. Call me when you get to the house.’

‘Sure.’ Derek blew out a deep breath. Things were getting worse and worse and he felt an urgent need to find Stiles and check he was okay.

-

The inside of the bus was a bloodbath. Noah was thankful that years of homicide investigations had inured him to the smell of it because it was pervasive. The CSI team was there, but there wasn’t much they could do apart from collect the pieces and carry them out in black bags. The scraps of clothing and the odd personal effect aside, there was nothing else left.

He inspected a set of deep claw marks in one of the seats and shuddered. He had yet to see what this alpha looked like, although Laura had given him a brief rundown and showed him a clip or two from a couple of werewolf movies she deemed reasonably close to what it looked like and Noah knew he was going to have nightmares knowing that Kate Argent was some mutated monster capable of ripping a grown man apart with apparently little effort.

The last CSI officer left the bus carrying Garrison's head and he had to stifle a hysterical laugh as the mental image of a bowling ball came to mind. Once the woman was far enough away, he looked at Laura and Tara, yet another revelation. Right then though, Noah was ready to accept pretty much anything.

'So?' He put his hands on his hips. 'Thoughts.'

Laura and Tara exchanged a look and then Tara's warm brown eyes went completely black. She moved between the seats, her face set in a disgusted grimace.

'She caught him by surprise.' she said, her hand hovering over a seat. 'He was just getting set up. She didn't kill him immediately though, no. She played with him, drove him to the back and then...' She retched and covered her hand with her mouth, eyes changing back. 'Jesus, it was brutal.'

'It was Kate.' Laura was looking at Noah and her own eyes had changed, the irises a glowing crimson red. 'I can smell her everywhere. Unfortunately that's not enough in a court of law.'

'You said there's a connection?' he asked and she nodded.

'Meyers worked for the insurance firm that investigated the fire.' Her lip curled and Noah startled when he saw that she had fangs. 'He decreed it an electrical fault and so there was no criminal investigation. My guess, Kate paid him off and now she's tying up loose ends.'

'That makes sense.' Tara looked back at them. 'The malice I can feel in here is almost overwhelming. I don't think she's sane anymore but she's not feral enough to lose herself to the wolf. She's fighting it hard.'

'That doesn't surprise me.' Laura growled. 'She's probably furious that she turned.'

'There's a lot of anger.' Tara confirmed. 'She tortured him.'

'Lovely.' Noah raised his eyes to the roof and then wished he hadn't when he saw what was sticking to it. 'Is that an eye?'

'Oh God.' Tara said. 'I think it is.'

Laura heaved a sigh and then reached into her pocket. Her phone was playing the 1812 Overture.

'Peter's sense of humour.' she explained. 'Can I take this. He's patrolling with Derek and Cora.'

'Sure.' Noah inched his way along to Tara, wincing at the way his show covers squelched. 'So how do you...?'

'I'm a witch.' Tara replied. 'I work with energies and spells based on them. I'm not a druid or a Spark like Stiles is, my tradition comes from a very old lineage. When my family was brought to this country they were already practising.'

'Where from?' Noah asked, curious.

'West Africa. We don't know exactly where, obviously.' Tara replied. 'It's different to the European systems that Aneta followed. Harley is better at it than I am. She's a natural. I remember coming into her room when she was a baby and she was levitating her toys over her crib.'

'I never knew about Stiles.' Noah was surprised to find himself confessing. 'Not a thing. Or about

Claudia. It's been a shock, to be honest.'

'I can understand that.' Tara said. 'Harley's dad was never in the picture so I didn't have that particular difficulty, but I'm sure she had her reasons.'

'I don't know.' Noah looked past her to Laura. 'I'm hoping to ask.'

'Maybe not today.' Laura was looking unsettled. 'Peter and Chris have found another body in the preserve. A teenage boy.'

'Jesus.' Noah's shoulders drooped. 'Not again.'

-

'So, are you going to actually tell me what the hell is going on here?' Chris asked and Peter stopped where he was sniffing the edges of the treeline and glanced at him.

'I get that you want to help but you'll forgive me if I don't really trust you.' he replied with a smirk.

'We're all in this shit together, Peter.' Chris narrowed his ice blue eyes at him. 'Allison and I want to help. Listen to me heartbeat if you don't believe me.'

Peter sighed. He knew Chris was telling the truth, could hear it and smell it but he was feeling obstinate. Finally he made a face and stalked to the hollow.

'What do you see?' he asked and Chris frowned.

'A teenage boy.' he replied. 'Probably sixteen?'

'Killed by...?' Peter prompted and Chris crouched to examine the dead boy a little more closely.

'It's clear that whatever it was, it was heavy and had a reasonably sharp edge.' he replied. 'I'd say something like a crowbar but I'm not a pathologist.'

'You are a hunter though.' Peter replied. 'He was murdered, you'll concede that much?'

'Of course.' Chris replied. 'What are you getting at?'

'This is the second teenager killed in the reserve.' Peter replied. 'And I'm betting that when we find out who he is, we'll also find out that he was a virgin.'

'How the fuck...?' Chris straightened up and glared at him. 'You know what's doing this.'

'I think I know.' Peter corrected. 'Emily, the first victim, was a virgin. She'd been garrotted and some odd markings had been cut into her skin. I'm sure that he'll be the same.'

'It's a ritual?' Chris climbed out of the hollow, looking back at the dead boy with a disturbed expression.

'There will be another one.' Peter said. 'That one will have their throat slit. It's a spell. The three virgins give the caster their innocence and their youth. Whoever it is, they are using these things to disguise themselves. They will have the appearance of innocence and youthfulness, all taken from their sacrifices.'

'What's doing it?' Chris asked, shifting his rifle. Peter could smell the anxiety on him and gave in.

Maybe Derek and Cora were right. They had a better chance of fighting this in numbers.

‘Have you ever heard of a darach?’ he asked.

-

Stiles stared at the dice circling overhead. He and Harley were on the floor next to his bed, his D & D dice scattered around apart from the set that she was currently levitating.

‘That is so cool.’ he breathed.

‘I know.’ Harley’s eyes were black, tiny glowing lights dancing between her fingers. ‘It was my first bit of magic that I could do.’

‘Stiles!’ Scott yelled from downstairs. ‘I can hear Cora and Derek and...’ He broke off and then there was the sound of his feet thundering up the stairs and they waited for him to appear at the door of Stiles’ room. Lydia was on Stiles’ bed, cross legged and working in her laptop and she gave Scott a quizzical look.

‘What?’ she asked and Scott bounced in place.

‘Allison.’ he hissed. ‘She’s with them.’

‘Oh.’ Lydia was up in a flash. Stiles looked at Harley, who shrugged, and they both got up. The dice clattered to the floor as they made their way downstairs while Scott tore into the bathroom, no doubt to check his hair.

Stiles got to the back door in time to see Derek and Cora hopping over the fence, followed by Allison with a very scary looking bow. He grinned in greeting but his smile fell away when he saw how grim they looked. Derek got to him first and Stiles looked at him questioningly.

‘Hey.’ He caught him by his jacket and pulled him in. ‘What’s wrong?’

‘We found another body in the preserve.’ Cora was the one who answered as she came up onto the back porch. Her mouth was set. ‘Another teenager. It’s probably someone we go to school with. Peter didn’t let us get a good look.’

‘Fuck.’ Stiles looked past them to Allison. ‘Hi.’

‘Hi.’ Allison gave him a little wave.

‘We ran into her and Chris patrolling.’ Derek explained. ‘We thought it would be okay if she came here with us while they called the body in.’

‘Sure.’ Stiles nodded and stepped back. ‘Mi casa es su casa.’

Allison gave him a grateful smile and started to climb the first step, only to be pushed back by what seemed to be an invisible wall. It sparked when she touched it, making a hurt noise.

‘Damn.’ She rubbed her hand. ‘It’s like being shocked.’

‘Okay.’ Stiles frowned. ‘I have no idea why that’s happening.’

‘It’s a ward.’ Harley came out the back door. ‘The magic that protects this house won’t let her in.’ Her eyes were flinty when she looked at Allison. ‘She’s a hunter.’

'Oh.' Stiles said. 'I guess that makes sense.'

'Aneta wouldn't have trusted hunters.' Derek told him, his hand on Stiles' arm. 'But we trust her.' He smiled at Allison and Stiles knew there was a story there he didn't know about yet. He glanced at Cora and she nodded.

'She's okay. You can let her in.' She moved past them into the kitchen with a low 'Hey Harley.' and Stiles looked at Derek.

'I don't know how.' he said, turning to Harley. 'Do you?'

'It's not my magic.' Harley replied. 'Wards are unique to the person who cast them. This is Aneta's house and while it's happy to let me in because it knows me, you'll have to tell it that Allison means no harm.' She moved to address Allison. 'And you'll probably have to make some kind of pact for him to do that.'

'I can do that.' Allison said eagerly. 'I already decreed a truce with Derek and Cora and I'll be doing it formally with Laura when I can. Would it be the same?'

'Probably.' Harley replied. 'Try it.'

'Wait.' Derek went back down the steps. 'Give me your hand.'

Allison looked a little flustered but she did as he asked, wincing when he pierced her thumb with a claw.

'Blood magic.' Harley nodded her head approvingly. 'Stiles, you have to focus. Try talking to the house in your head and telling it that she can come in, that she's protected. Allison, shake the blood on the step, so it can know you.'

'Okay.' Allison still looked sceptical but she did as Harley instructed and Stiles closed his eyes.

'You need to visualise it.' Harley's voice came closer. He felt her take his hands. 'Ground yourself and then open up to the energy around you. The house will know what to do so trust it. You're a Spark. Believe in what you want to do and then do it.'

Stiles took a deep breath and then focused. A little way from him, he felt Derek like a warm golden glow and latched on, feeling himself relax as he wrapped himself in it like a warm blanket. He reached out the way Lydia had taught him on Saturday. The house shone in his mind's eye like a complicated scaffolding of energy, lines of light interwoven together. He had worked on it all day the day before, learning it inside and out. It had been surprisingly easy once he'd started and he could now trace the gleaming edges of the lines, the wards that Aneta had obviously set up.

She's safe. He told the house. You can let her in.

Nothing happened at first but then the lines seemed to shimmer and there was a feeling like his ears popping, his eyes flying open. In his head, a line of bright blue shot through the wards and Allison all but fell through the invisible wall. Derek caught her and held her to stand. He looked at Stiles, awe and something else that made Stiles' skin feel hot in his eyes, his smile stretching across his face. He gently steered Allison up the stairs just as Scott came hurtling out the back door.

'Hi.' he beamed at her.

'Hi.' Allison was still looking at Stiles, her dark eyes wide and astonished. 'Thank you Stiles.'

'No problem.' Stiles grinned and Scott dragged her inside.

'Nicely done.' Harley said with a smirk and followed them, leaving him and Derek on the porch.

'Did you see that?' Stiles laughed. 'I totally...'

'He got cut off by Derek catching his face in his hands and kissing him. It was full of feeling, deep and warm and wet and when Derek let him go, his eyes were glowing gold.'

'Wow.' Stiles was giddy. 'What was that for?'

'You anchored yourself with me.' Derek's smile was incandescent. 'You chose me.'

'Well, yeah.' Stiles smiled back at him. 'Obviously. Dude, you're totally it for me.'

'Fuck. I can't believe you.' Derek kissed him again, the force of it bruising. Stiles fell into it, opening his mouth and responding in kind until they were both breathless.

'I take it, that's a good thing.' he breathed and Derek gave a happy little growl and nuzzled his cheek.

'It's a very good thing.' His eyes were green again and full of affection. 'You didn't even hesitate.'

'Why would I?' Stiles asked. 'You already know how I feel about you.'

'Yeah.' Derek took his hand and pressed it to his chest. 'I can feel it right here. It's like a link between us. Can you feel it too?'

Stiles felt the steady thump of Derek's heart under his palm and then it was there, like a string tugged tight between them and rooting itself under his breastbone.

'Holy shit.' He looked into Derek's eyes. 'Is that us?'

'It is.' Derek was beaming at him. 'It's like the link I have with the pack and Laura. I can feel you through it. It's what happens with...'

'Mates.' Stiles finished for him, delighted by how happy he felt. 'Dude, this is huge.'

Derek laughed, his whole face crinkling up. It was so cute, Stiles wanted to jump him right there on the porch.

'Come on.' He tugged on Derek's hand. 'I've got other stuff to tell you.'

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'Fuck.' Laura wasn't pleased. 'And you're sure?'

'Smell around.' Peter waved a hand at the hollow. 'There's not a single scent track or footprint, the exact same thing as happened with Emily. One was garrotted and one's been killed by being hit on the head. It's a Threefold Death, I'm telling you now. This Darach has one more to make for virgins, a death by cutting the throat of the sacrifice.'

'And you agree?' Laura looked at Chris. He shrugged.

'Magic of this kind is not my specialty.' he replied. 'I went through every resource I had and I found very little.'

'This is ancient magic.' Peter explained. 'This is a perversion of druidism. Whoever this is, they were once a druid. I would even say that they might have been an emissary, which is how they know about our Nemeton. They're using the telluric currents to bolster their magic.'

'To what end though?' Laura asked. 'This doesn't make any sense.'

'They might want to take over the territory.' Chris ventured. 'If they are tapping into the Nemeton, then they must have plans for it.'

'Crap.' Laura made a face. 'This means talking to Deaton again. Peter, you'll have to do it. I need to stay here and wait for the coroner and the CSIs. Jesus, I need this like a hole in the fucking head.'

'Goddammit.' Peter rolled his eyes. 'Fine. He'll probably be able to tell us more.' He gave Chris a thoughtful look. 'You want to come along?'

'Might as well.' Laura told him when Chris looked to her. 'He may well get annoyed enough to poke holes in Deaton. It will be good to have a responsible adult along.'

'Oh, ha ha.' Peter bared his teeth at her. 'Come along, Christopher. We have a druid to interrogate.'

Chapter 18

The end of the week brought no answers at all. Laura seemed as frustrated as she'd ever been and Peter wasn't feeling much better. Deaton had clammed up tighter than he ever had, avoiding them completely. Chris didn't have much to offer - druids were so far out of his expertise that he was having to call in every favour he had from hunters the world over and all that had come back was that darachs were very bad news and usually eluded capture by completely destroying anything in their way. Noah had tried to minimise the fallout of so many teenage deaths by instituting a town wide curfew of seven pm for all minors and had bussed in some extra troops from neighbouring counties to help out with the increased patrols. As for the pack, they had stuck to each other like glue, following stern instructions from both Laura and Noah, and shuttled between school, the book store and each other's houses. Laura had even mentioned bringing in a family that were experts on the supernatural and who would be arriving that weekend.

So far, it seemed to be working but everyone could feel something building, like an incoming thunder storm.

Stiles rubbed his eyes and blinked to clear them, the words on the page in front of him taunting him as they simply refused to enter his head. His ADHD got so much worse when he was tired and they were all running on empty. Peter had decided he needed to get up to speed as quickly as possible and so he'd put Stiles in touch with another spark that he knew, an emissary for a pack up in Washington. Harry was very supportive but it was hard trying to keep up with his school work and learn from her at the same time. She had also sent down a couple of books by courier and it was these that he was studying, sat at the small table at the back of the book shop. It was Saturday so technically it wasn't Derek's day to work but neither of them felt like being apart and he was busy manning the desk while Stiles read. Peter was upstairs on the mezzanine, working on his laptop and muttering to himself. Stiles couldn't make out what he was saying but the look on Derek's face told him it wasn't good.

The doorbell tinkled and Lydia came in, Erica just behind her. They had Allison with them and that had Stiles exchanging looks with Derek. He was pleased. Allison definitely benefited from hanging out with them. She'd opened up a lot in the past few days, telling them about her family and her mom's death at the hands of Kate. In return, Cora and Derek had talked a lot about their pack. Stiles liked to think it was healing. He'd even managed to start talking about Claudia, although that was to Peter more than anyone else. He knew that his dad was also doing that, dropping by after hours when Peter was still in the shop to learn about that part of his wife's life. He'd come home a few times, subdued and red-eyed, stopping in the door of Stiles' room before coming to run a hand over Stiles' hair and murmur that he loved him. Stiles would always pretend to be asleep but he could almost feel the pain his father was in.

'Hey.' Lydia set her bag down on the chair opposite him. She looked as tired as they all felt, dark shadows under her eyes and her hair uncharacteristically messy. Allison looked a bit better but her nails were bitten right down to the quick and although Erica had werewolf healing on her side, Laura had the pack running patrols day and night and she'd decided to err on the side of comfort, forgoing her usual heels and mini skirts for flat boots and jeans instead. She went to hop up on the counter and Allison took a seat on the stairs, dropping her bag in front of her with a clunk. It had a lot of stuff in it and Stiles was forever grateful because Beacon Hills didn't have security barriers like his city school had because she would have been in deep shit. Chris had insisted that she be armed at all times and Stiles had honestly never seen so much James Bond shit before.

'Hey.' He sighed and closed the book in front of him. 'So I got dick.'

Derek snorted behind the counter and Stiles couldn't help grinning.

'I do not want to know about your sex life, thank you.' Lydia said primly, taking out her Macbook.

'I do.' Erica leaned over to prod Derek in the shoulder.

'Fuck off.' he growled, but his mouth was quirking at the corners.

'Seriously though.' Erica leaned back on her hands. 'It's all the whole school can talk about at the moment so you may as well join in.'

'Talk about what?' Peter came down the stairs, giving Allison a half smile when she shifted over to let him pass. It was awkward as hell because everyone was now aware that he and Chris were definitely boning, but it had also started something that could be tentatively called a relationship between them that had the whole pack watching with heart eyes.

'That the killer is targeting virgins.' Lydia replied. 'It's got the whole damn school in a state.'

'Well, it's not like it's not true.' Peter asked and Lydia made a face.

'It's basically giving a entire school a license to act like horny assholes and take every excuse to fuck.' she snorted. 'Thomas is having conniptions. Finstock found an orgy going on in the second storey janitor's closet yesterday after school and then he had to break up one couple fucking in the gym and two more in the locker rooms.'

'Fun.' Peter grabbed his jacket from the hook. 'I'm going to meet Gabriel. He's set up a meeting between me and the Yukimuras this afternoon. Lock up when you leave.'

Erica waited until his car started before she grinned.

'Want to know what everyone else is talking about?' she asked and Stiles frowned.

'What about?'

Erica cackled and kicked her heels against the counter, getting another growl from Derek.

'They're having a Bust Your Cherry party at the Jungle tonight.' She dug out a pack of gum and offered it to Derek before unwrapping a piece and shoving it in her mouth, the smell of artificial fruit filling the air.

'Jesus Christ.' Derek muttered, shaking his head. 'Seriously?'

'Seriously.' Allison sighed. 'At least we're all safe.'

'Um, not all of us.' Stiles said and saw the surprise on her face. 'What?'

'It's just...' She glanced at Derek, whose ears were going scarlet. 'I thought what with you two being together...'

'Enough.' Derek snapped and she flinched at his harsh tone.

'Sorry.' She looked away and Stiles glared at his boyfriend. Derek looked mutinous for all of a minute and then dropped.

'No, I'm just freaked out.' He sighed. 'We're all tired.'

‘Okay.’ Allison gave him a small smile.

There was an awkward silence until Erica cracked her gum loudly and made them all jump.

‘We should go.’ she announced.

‘Why?’ Lydia smirked at her. ‘You’re not a virgin.’

‘Neither are you.’ Erica retorted and then looked thoughtful. ‘Or are you? Do strap-ons count?’

‘Of course they count.’ Lydia tossed her ponytail over her shoulder. ‘And even if they didn’t, the intent was there. Besides, you’re forgetting that thing with Jackson in sophomore year.’

‘Oh yeah.’ Erica grinned and Stiles looked at her in astonishment.

‘You and Jackson?’ he asked and Lydia rolled her eyes.

‘It was a phase.’ she replied, her eyes moving to Allison. ‘What about you?’

‘There was a boy last year.’ Allison smiled but it was sad. ‘He moved to France to continue his training.’

‘Oh great.’ Stiles grumbled, slumping in his chair. ‘So it’s just...’

‘You and Derek?’ Erica winked at him. ‘Yep.’

‘Fucking hell.’ Derek fell forward into his folded arms. ‘Can we please stop talking about this?’

‘Hang on.’ Stiles looked thoughtful. ‘Scott too.’

Derek raised his head, his eyes flashing gold.

‘I am not boning Scott.’ he said very decisively and Erica burst out laughing. Stiles gaped at him for a minute and then started laughing as well, Lydi and Allison joining in until Derek had no choice but to smile.

-

‘You okay?’ Isaac asked and Scott heaved a sigh and nodded.

‘I guess.’ He kicked at a tuft of grass.

‘Okay.’ Isaac tilted his head. ‘Is it about Allison?’

Scott eventually nodded again, feeling morose.

‘She’s just so...’ He shrugged and Isaac made a sympathetic noise.

‘I think maybe you need to give up on that.’ he said and Scott gave him an outraged look.

‘But I love her!’ He huffed and stomped along the edge of the field. ‘I just want a chance.’

‘She’s a hunter, Scott.’ Isaac replied. ‘Look, I know you like her but they’re raised to put their duty first. Allison may be young but she’s the matriarch of her clan now. That’s a lot of responsibility and she probably thinks that you would be an unnecessary distraction. That or she just doesn’t feel the same way.’

‘You think she doesn’t like me?’ Scott whined and Isaac made a helpless gesture.

‘I think she likes you fine.’ he replied. ‘But maybe not like that. The best thing you can do here is just be graceful about it.’

‘That’s easy for you to say.’ Scott wanted to claw something. ‘You’ve got Cora.’

‘You can’t force something that’s not there.’ Isaac said. ‘Come on, we were supposed to be practising.’

Scott muttered but picked up the pace, jogging after him to where Jackson was waiting on the restraining line. Danny was goal, waiting for them to start running an attack again. It had been their idea for Scott to work with them so he could improve his skills and he had to admit that he really was enjoying it. He’d never been able to play competitive sport before and now that he was fit enough, he never wanted to stop.

‘Finally.’ Jackson was tossing the ball up and down. ‘You two ready to play some serious lacrosse?’

‘Against you?’ Isaac grinned, his fangs just showing. ‘You realise that there’s two of us.’

‘Yeah?’ Jackson was looking past him. ‘Well, I think reinforcements just arrived.’

Scott turned to see an unfamiliar silver sedan parking at the side of the field. The passenger door opened and a slender black haired girl fell out. As in literally fell out, squawking as she hit the ground and sprawled there.

‘Oh God.’ Scott was moving before he could even think. ‘Are you okay?’ He got to her and helped her up, something in his brain going click when she beamed up at him with big eyes that were so dark they were almost as black as the two braids that framed her face. Her smile was like sunshine and she thrust her kit bag into his arms and turned back to the car.

‘Just a sec.’ She rummaged in the back seat, coming out with a duffle and a crosse that she dumped on the ground. ‘I’ll call you later?’

‘Okay, sweetheart.’ The older man in the front of the car smiled and nodded at Scott. ‘You part of the Hale pack, young man?’

‘Yes.’ Scott frowned. ‘But...’

‘Just tell Laura that she can call Noshiko tonight.’ the man said and then smiled at them both. ‘Have fun and no funny stuff.’

‘Sure Dad.’ The mystery girl grinned and slammed the door shut before turning back to Scott. ‘You’re the new guy, huh?’

‘Um.’ Scott looked at Isaac, who’d come up to greet the newcomer.

‘Hey Kira.’ he smiled. ‘I didn’t know you were coming to town today. I thought it was this weekend.’

‘Mom spoke to Laura this morning.’ Kira shouldered her duffle and picked up her crosse. ‘She’s going to be helping to try and track down the alpha tonight. We’re staying for a while. Dad’s got a substitute job at the school and I got enrolled today.’

'Is it for Harris?' Isaac asked. 'Please tell me it's for Harris.'

'No.' Kira laughed and Scott melted on the inside. She was so cute, dressed in a cropped sports top and leggings, clearly ready to play. 'Your maths teacher. I think her name's Finch. She put in her two week's notice when the bus driver got sliced and diced. My mom got a call from Satomi saying that there was an alpha sniffing around and that you guys might need some help so here we are.'

'You know about us?' Scott had only just put two and two together and Kira laughed at him, her smile impish. Her dark eyes burned a deep molten orange and Scott jumped back in surprise, colliding with Isaac.

'You're...' he started and she nodded.

'Not human.' she replied. 'Well sort of. My dad's human but I take after my mom.'

'Kira's a kitsune.' This was from Jackson, who'd jogged over to join them. 'You know what that is?'

'No.' Scott replied truthfully. Kira's scent had changed with her transformation and now she smelled like Stiles did when he worked with magic, but with a musky animal tone underneath.

'Fox spirit.' Kira told him. 'I'm more specifically a thunder kitsune. I've only got one tail so far because I'm young but my mom is a full nine-tailed fox.'

'I have no idea what any of that means.' Scott replied. 'But I'd love to find out.'

He completely missed the matching grins on Isaac and Jackson's faces as they realised that Kira had completely managed to knock all thoughts of Allison right out of his head.

-

At closing time with the others long gone, Derek locked the shop door and turned to find Stiles looking very thoughtful. He immediately went on his guard because he'd learned that that look on Stiles' face usually preceded something that might sound reckless as hell.

'What.' he didn't even bother trying to make it a question.

'Just thinking.' Stiles said. 'That cherry popping thing later. We should totally go.'

'Oh?' Derek couldn't stop his eyebrows from shooting up. It wasn't like he and Stiles hadn't fooled around every spare minute they got, but this was a whole other level. This was sex.

'Yeah.' Stiles' amber eyes were sparkling. 'If I were a murderous dark druid after a virgin, where better to look than a whole club full. We could lure them out and catch them.'

'Oh.' Derek deflated. 'That's why you'd want to go.'

'Well, that and the obvious.' Stiles sidled up to him, giving Derek a seriously flirtatious look from under his lashes. 'I mean, if you wanted to.'

'I want to.' Derek's heart started to thump. It was true too. He'd never really felt the urge to have sex with anyone, but with Stiles it was starting to intrude on his thoughts almost any time he had the time to drift. 'But Laura will actually kill both of us and your dad will probably finish off what's left if we go. And not just because...' He trailed off, eyes drawn to the way Stiles was worrying his lower lip between his teeth.

‘Because you want to bang me like a barn door in a hurricane?’ He smirked and Derek growled and then went red, slapping both hands over his mouth as his fangs dropped and his eyes flashed.

‘Stop that.’ he mumbled and Stiles cackled in delight.

‘No way, no when I get you to wolf out like that.’ He came closer, the warm line of his body pressed against Derek’s.

‘Huh?’ All the blood was rushing away from his brain and leaving him stupid.

‘I like it.’ Stiles whispered. ‘And if you play your cards right, we can play Little Red Riding Hood and Big Bad Wolf all you want later.’

Derek swallowed hard, trying not to pop his claws.

‘You really want to do this?’ he asked and Stiles nodded so enthusiastically that he looked like a bobblehead.

‘Come over to the house later.’ he said. ‘Wear something hot.’

Derek whined and then got cut off by Stiles kissing him hard enough to leave his mouth feeling tender. He wanted to keep going but got interrupted by the appearance of a cruiser coming down the street, flashing its lights once. When it pulled up, Tara leaned out her window and gave them both a stern look.

‘Boys.’ She raised an eyebrow at them. ‘It’s after five. You know that curfew starts in an hour and a half.’

‘On it.’ Stiles smiled. ‘I’m taking him home now.’

‘Good.’ Tara returned his smile. ‘By the way, your dad said that it would be okay if I got Harley to stay over with you and Scott tonight. Would you mind picking her up on your way home. She’s at the library.’

‘Sure.’ Stiles already had his phone out. ‘I’ll call her now.’ He walked towards his jeep and Tara gave Derek a stern look.

‘You need to make sure that they all stay safe tonight.’ she said. ‘No shenanigans. I mean it.’

‘I know.’ Derek was so thankful that she couldn’t hear his heartbeat. They had tried with Harley but she and Stiles both couldn’t do it so he took it as reasonable that Tara couldn’t either. Still, she had both a mom’s and a cops’ built in lie detector so he didn’t want to give her too much ammo. ‘I’ll make sure the pack are all together and keeping each other safe.’

After all, if Stiles wanted to go it was a given that everyone else would be going too.

‘Thank you.’ Tara smelled relieved and Derek felt bad, shuffling his feet as she drove off. He jumped when a hand landed on his shoulder and Stiles snickered and buried his nose in Derek’s neck from behind.

‘You a terrible liar.’ He wrapped both arms around Derek’s waist. ‘Look at it this way, we could be heroes for catching the darach.’

‘Or we could be ritually sacrificed.’ Derek grumbled and Stiles kissed the back of his neck.

‘Not if we work together.’ he replied. ‘I’m coming up with a plan as we speak.’

'Oh great.' Derek sighed. 'I can't wait.'

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Allison checked over her gear and frowned.

'Are we sure that she'll even be out?' she asked and Chris shrugged.

'It's a week until full moon.' He slotted a barrel into place with a loud click. 'She'll be restless.'

'Okay.' Allison tilted her head and grinned. 'So Lydia and Erica have invited me to a slumber party tonight.'

Chris raised an eyebrow at her and she knew he wasn't buying it.

'Please.' She turned on the puppy eyes, knowing that he couldn't resist a direct plea. 'It's been so long since I've had a chance to act like a normal teenager.'

Chris sighed but the guilty look in his eyes told her she had him. Allison didn't normally like lying to him but sometimes it was necessary to stop him from smothering her in overprotectiveness.

'Fine.' he said eventually. 'I suppose you'll be safe enough.'

Allison beamed at him, giving him the full dimple effect.

'I promise we'll stay out of trouble.' she told him and he snorted.

'I don't even want to touch that.' he muttered and left her cackling and shooting off a quick message to Lydia.

I'm in.

-

Jackson's phone went off as they were packing up their lacrosse kit and he took it out and grinned when he read the message.

'Party tonight.' he announced and Danny rolled his eyes.

'Let me guess.' he said. 'All the straight kids are taking over Jungle.'

'Lydia said they're throwing a Cherry Popping party.' Jackson stuck his phone back in his pocket and nodded at where Scott and Kira were still engaged in an animated conversation in the middle of the field. 'Although those two seem to have already made a head start.'

'That's because they're both dorks.' Isaac slung his bag into the Porsche's trunk and looked back at them. 'Hey! We need to hustle. Curfew is almost up.'

Scott and Kira both startled like rabbits and then came running over, still grinning goofily at each other.

'How are you getting home?' Jackson asked her. 'We don't have a lot of room but we can squeeze you in.'

'That's okay.' Kira said and as if summoned the car from earlier reappeared. This time it was being driven by a middle aged women, dark like her daughter and with an aura that could be sensed even

from a distance. Jackson wrinkled his nose, resisting the urge to sneeze and he could see that Isaac and Scott were too. Kira picked up her things and gave them all a little wave.

'I'll see you guys later.' she said and Jackson decided to throw his new packmate a bone.

'We should get your number.' he said. 'Seeing as you're here for a while and all.' He gave Scott a pointed look. 'Scott, why don't you take Kira's number.'

Scott looked torn between embarrassment and delight, going red when Kira bounced and held out her hand for his phone. She tapped her number in quickly, her own cheeks going pink.

'Call me.' she said and then took off for the car, leaving Scott gaping at her.

'Nice.' Isaac threw an arm around his shoulders as the car pulled off. 'Kira's cute as hell.'

'She's amazing.' Scott's face was wreathed in smiles. 'I didn't even know kitsunes existed.'

'Her mom was good friends with Derek and Cora's mom.' Jackson said. 'But kitsunes don't really do packs. They're more mobile, so Kira moves around a lot.'

'You ready to go?' Danny was looking at his watch.

'Sure.' Isaac opened the rear passenger door. 'By the way, what party were you talking about?'

'One we shouldn't be going anywhere near.' Danny muttered, getting into his side of the car.

'Please.' Jackson snorted. 'Like you ever follow the rules.'

'I do when I don't want to die.' Danny replied. 'Human here.'

'Aw.' Jackson leaned over to kiss him. 'I'll take care of you, baby.'

'Cora and Boyd are on their way back.' Isaac was looking at his phone, Scott next to him and staring dreamily out the window.

'Tell them about the party.' Jackson said, reversing out of the space. 'And tell Cora not to blab to Laura.'

'You know she's going to kill us.' Isaac laughed, but he didn't seem particularly worried.

'She won't.' Jackson said. 'Trust me.'

-

'You know if they catch us out, your ass and mine are grass.' Harley said, leaning between the front seats.

'That's what I said.' Derek told her, giving Stiles a look. 'This has disaster written all over it.'

'You two are such spoilsports.' Stiles pouted. 'Look, if we were run of the mill teenage disasters I would agree with you. But we're not. We are - at last count - six werewolves, a banshee, a kanima, a mage in training, a witch and a tech genius. If the alpha or the darach turns up, we can take them.'

Harley was shaking her head but Derek could smell her amusement and growled.

'Don't.' he warned her but it was too late.

'We're going to be in so much shit.' Harley's dark eyes were sparkling. 'But I guess it'll be worth it.'

'Atta girl!' Stiles beamed at her in the rearview mirror and held up his fist to bump.

-

Tara got back to the station and found Noah in his office, going over some plans for extra patrols.

'Hey Boss.' She leaned in the doorway and he smiled when he looked up. 'Stiles went to pick up Harley. Derek was with them.'

'Not a surprise.' Noah said. 'I can barely see daylight between him and Stiles now. Laura said it's kind of like a honeymoon phase.' He set the papers he was holding down and nodded at the board set up in the corner of the room. 'Laura's laid out some routes for tonight and the rest of the weekend.'

Tara went over to inspect the lines and he came to stand next to her, checking to see if anyone was in earshot.

'Have you picked up anything...witchy?' He looked so funny and so earnest that Tara sniggered.

'It doesn't work like that.' she replied. 'There are different kinds of magic users and the really powerful ones are very good at hiding. Whoever this is, they're much more powerful than Harley and I are. But, they'd also be stupid as hell to try anything and the curfew will make it really difficult to get their hands on anyone after dark. The commonality here is that both victims were out after ours and without their parents' knowledge. Hopefully, we've tightened up on enough on that for it to not play into anything.'

'Where do you want me?' Tara asked and he ran a finger along the southern boundary of the preserve.

'Here, with Laura.' he replied. 'Chris Argent has offered to be inside the preserve.'

'Hunters.' Tara muttered. 'But I guess you have to do what you have to do.'

'Peter Hale will be with him.' The corner of Noah's mouth quirked. 'Now that is an odd couple, if you ask me.'

'You're not wrong.' Laura's voice came from the doorway. She came in, looking fierce. 'There are scent marks along the northern boundary of our territory. Cora just messaged me. The alpha's been there.'

'How long ago?' Noah asked, all business now. Laura closed the door and sighed. Her eyes flickering red once.

'Today. Cora said about three hours ago. That's not the worst of it. She had someone with her.'

'What?' Tara met Noah's astonished eyes. 'Like another hunter?'

'God no.' Laura smirked. 'They would shoot her in sight. Cora said it smells like another shifter but overlaid with Kate's scent. It's pack, or what would pass for pack with her feral state. She's probably got it in thrall.'

'So who the hell would that be?' Noah frowned and Laura made a face.

'We didn't find all the bodies,' she pointed out. 'And Boyd and Cora both agree that it smells male. I'm thinking that Kate bit herself a beta.'

'Great.' Noah threw up his hands. 'So we've got two crazy ass werewolves to deal with?'

'Not exactly.' Laura said. 'Cora said he doesn't smell like a wolf. I should probably explain that when the bite is given, it doesn't always end up with a wolf form. Jackson is a perfect example of that. He's a kanima.'

'How does that happen though?' Tara asked.

'My mom always used to say that you take the shape that you are, not the shape of the bite.' Laura said. 'Cora says that the shifter smells like coyote. It's likely that if this is Theo Raeken, and that's who i'm putting my money on, he's now a werecoyote and bound to Kate.'

'Shit.' Noah pinched the bridge of his nose. 'That's bad news.'

'Not as bad as you think.' Laura replied. 'He's bound to her, but she's also bound to him. If we could catch him, we could lure her out. Not only that, but he's newly turned. He'll be close to feral without a normal pack to anchor him. It'll be fairly easy to catch him and contain him. I've already called Chris and he and Peter are going to try and track him down.,

'Where the hell do we start looking though?' Tara asked and Laura grinned.

'I spoke to the Raekens,' she said. 'They said that their security lights have been going off for the past week. I went round there and the stink of coyote is everywhere. My guess is he's been trying to go home but Kate is obviously stopping him.'

'Jesus.' Noah heaved a sigh. 'Guess we'll have to put their place on the patrol route too.'

-

'What do you want to eat?' Stiles had his head stuck in the fridge.

'Anything.' Harley smiled from the kitchen table. He leaned back to look at Derek and found him looking at his phone.

'The pack's on their way,' he said. 'Don't worry about food, Boyd said that they're making a stop for burgers.'

'Oooh, I'm in.' Harley took the phone from him, tapping out her order.

'All of them?' Stiles asked and Derek shook his head.

'Erica, Lydia and Allison are at Lydia's house. They're doing some sort of feminine ritual apparently.' He glanced at Harley. 'Lydia asked if you want to go over there.'

'Nah.' Harley smiled. 'I have a few tricks of my own.' She stood up and twirled and in the blink of an eye her clothing changed from jeans, t-shirt and cardigan to a denim mini shirt with leggings underneath and a cute sparkly top, her hair fluffing out and then reforming into an abundance of finger coils, shot through with electric blue strands.

'Holy shit.' Stiles looked delighted. 'That was amazing!'

'Magic had its benefits.' Harley grinned. 'And you have a whole house at your disposal. I'm surprised it hasn't done this for you.'

'It kind of has.' Stiles looked shyly at Derek. 'It leaves clothes out for me all the time. I think it knows what Derek likes.'

'If we're dressing up I should go home.' Derek said.

No sooner had the words left his mouth than there was a loud popping sound and he got hit from above with a shower of fabric. He made a muffled noise, flailing with an uncharacteristic lack of grace until he was free of them. Stiles and Harley gaped at him and then Harley crowed and whacked Stiles in the arm.

'Ha!' She was grinning. 'Guess the house doesn't want you to leave, Derek.'

'That's because here is the safest place to be.' Stiles knew it was true the moment he said it. 'Shit, that's why the house always wants us here.'

'It does?' Derek frowned and he nodded.

'Every time we have to get together, I feel like we need to be here.' He looked at Harley. 'The wards, right?'

'Yeah.' Harley nodded. 'Also because the pack house isn't your house yet so it tries to pull you here to be safe.'

'What do you mean yet?' Stiles asked and Derek looked thoughtful.

'You're not a wolf.' he said. 'But Scott is and he's part of your pack here. Think of the Sheriff as your alpha.'

'He's right.' Harley said. 'Have you considered being an emissary? That would be the most likely way you'd fit in.'

'No?' Stiles said. 'Peter's mentioned it a couple of times and the Spark I'm talking to is her pack's emissary but I hadn't really thought about it.'

'You should.' Harley said. 'If your connection to the Nemeton is as strong as you've told me it is and your mom was supposed to be the Hale emissary then it makes sense that it wants you to step in. It probably chose you long before.'

'That's what Peter says too.' Derek was looking at him. 'And we can all feel you like part of the pack, but it's weaker than it should be.'

He didn't need to say it was weaker than he wanted because Stiles could read it all over his face and he smiled and went over to kiss him.

'It's an idea.' he said and Derek smiled and pulled him into his lap.

-

'What do you think?' Erica asked, turning to show off her outfit. 'Too slutty?'

'You can never be too slutty.' Lydia countered and looked her up and down. 'But is it something you're happy to get paint all over?'

‘Huh?’ Allison looked confused and Lydia showed her her screen. It was a text from Danny saying that word on the street was that it was going to be a black light party. ‘What does that mean?’

‘A black light party means minimal clothing so you can get all painted up.’ Lydia said and Erica clapped her hands together and promptly discarded her outer layer, leaving her in her black mini and leather look cropped bustier.

‘How about now?’ she asked and Lydia gave her a thumb’s up.

‘That’s perfect.’ she said. ‘Also, Kira’s in town. Jackson said they haven’t invited her but I can fix that.’

‘Who’s Kira?’ Allison asked and Erica flopped down on the bed next to her.

‘She’s a friend of ours.’ she replied. ‘But you’re asking the wrong question.’

‘Oh.’ Allison grinned. ‘What is she then?’

‘Kitsune.’ Lydia was busy texting. ‘She’s only got one tail so far, but her mom is the full nine tails so she’s ridiculously powerful.’

‘Wow.’ Allison looked excited. ‘I’ve never met a kitsune before. They’re really rare.’

‘Kira’s great.’ Erica flicked out her claws and inspected them. ‘She’s so much fun but be careful around her. She’s kind of clumsy and has a habit of accidentally shocking people when she gets drunk.’

‘I can’t wait to meet her.’ Allison said and her sincerity shone through like a sunbeam. Lydia laughed and wagged her phone at her.

‘The best part.’ She gave Allison an evil smile. ‘Scott is completely smitten with her. He didn’t mention you once after she got there.’

‘Oh thank God.’ Allison collapsed on the bed. ‘I mean, he’s sweet and all but I’m just not in the market.’

‘I know.’ Lydia smirked. ‘Who do you think told her to go play lacrosse with them.’

Erica cackled and high fived her.

‘You are an evil genius.’ she said and Lydia flicked her hair over her shoulder.

‘I know.’ she replied and looked very pleased with herself.

-

The impromptu lacrosse team fell in through the front door and Stiles pointed at the stairs.

‘You’re all filthy.’ he accused. ‘It’s like you were raised by wolves or something.’

‘That never gets old.’ Jackson came to sit down next to him, tilting his head to listen. ‘But it sounds like your shower’s already occupied.’

‘Derek.’ Stiles replied. ‘He was already showered and dressed and he and Harley were playing Portal while they waited. ‘How did it go.’

'He'll do.' Jackson said and Scott preened as he took the other armchair. Isaac and Danny argued briefly about who would get the next shower and then did a quick game of rock, paper, scissor with Isaac crowing when Danny lost. He disappeared upstairs with his duffle bag and Isaac came to flop into the last chair. The best thing about magical houses was that they never ran out of hot water so he was content to wait. They sat and watched the battle raging in the TV screen until both Jackson and Isaac tilted their heads in that wolflike way of theirs and then Stiles heard the sound of the bathroom door and knew Derek was out and Danny was in.

He waited, holding his breath until Derek appeared. The clothes the house had provided fit perfectly and the black henley made his shoulder look even broader than normal. If Stiles had been a damsel he would have swooned right over onto Harley. He came to shove Stiles over, squeezing in next to him and Stiles got hit by a wave of body wash and clean Derek smell. It was heady and he unashamedly sniffed him.

'You're starting to turn into a wolf.' Isaac laughed and Stiles chuckled a throw pillow at him.

'You got anything to eat?' Jackson asked. 'I'm starving.'

'You could always go catch some crickets in the back yard.' Stiles snickered and Jackson bared his teeth at him.

'Asshole.' he said without heat and then perked up. 'I hear Boyd's truck.'

Sure enough, the truck pulled up a couple of minutes later and Boyd and Cora came in, laden with take out bags that smelled strongly of garlic. Cora immediately turned big brown eyes on her brother and he growled.

'No.' he said. 'It's one thing for us to go but you're sixteen.'

'Old enough to kick omega butt and old enough to go to a goddamn party.' Cora countered, going to sit on Isaac with preamble. 'Besides if you don't let me go with, I'm going to bust all of you to Laura.'

'How did you even find out?' Derek glared at Boyd, who was nonplussed.

'Erica.' he replied. 'How else?'

'So it's a group activity.' Stiles laughed, winking at Scott. 'Beats sitting home by ourselves.'

Scott drifted dreamily to sit next to Isaac's chair, and Stiles frowned.

'Hey.' he threw another throw pillow. 'You even listening?'

'He met someone today.' Jackson and Isaac shared a smug look.

'What about Allison?' Stiles asked and Scott seemed to wake up a little.

'She's okay.' he said, like he hadn't been swearing undying love just that morning. 'But Kira is amazing.'

'You're about as shallow as puddle, buddy.' Stiles snorted and then made an outraged noise when he fell through a sneaky portal Harley had just opened underneath him. 'Goddammit!'

'Don't hate the player, baby.' she replied, digging her elbow into his side.

'Shower's free!' Danny yelled from upstairs and Jackson and Isaac locked eyes once again and

then both bolted for the stairs. There was the sound of growling and tussling all the way up and then a loud thump that had them all wincing, apart from Scott, who was beaming into space.

‘Watch the furniture!’ Stiles bellowed and then sniffed. ‘Smells good.’

‘Is that lasagna?’ Derek had an adorably hopeful look on his face. Stiles was in love with how much Derek was in love with food.

‘Mario’s finest.’ Boyd confirmed and then got mobbed, the game and even Allison forgotten.

Chapter 19

‘Holy shit!’ Stiles smile was filled with unholy glee. ‘Look at that!’

Derek sighed and regarded the warehouse in front of them, the neon green sign over the entrance making his eyes luminous. Jungle was on what could be coyly termed the ‘wrong side of town’ and it showed. The line was already around the block, the giggling teenagers that filled it a far cry from the usual clientele. Danny and Jackson were ahead of them, sailing past the bouncers, who Danny greeted warmly. He stopped briefly to wave the rest of them through and they followed. Cora and Harley were just ahead with Isaac and Scott was behind him and Derek, hesitating as they got to the door. He tugged on the back of Stiles’ shirt and hissed in his ear.

‘Maybe we shouldn’t.’ His dark eyes were huge as three drag queens came out for a smoke break.

‘It’ll be fine.’ Stiles assured him, grabbing onto Derek’s hand as they went in.

Inside it was cavernous, the darkness lit by black lights and flashes of neon and strobe. The whole place was heaving with people dancing or crowding around the huge square bar in the middle of the room. There was a stage at the far end and several raised platforms and Stiles’ grinned at the scantily clad men on top of them. He elbowed Derek in the side.

‘You could do that.’ He snickered at Derek’s unimpressed face. ‘Your abs are far superior.’

‘Dick.’ Derek tightened his grip on Stiles’ hand. ‘Just stay behind me, okay.’

‘Fine.’ Stiles looked back at Scott. ‘You okay there?’

‘Yeah.’ Scott was goggling at everything around them. ‘I’ve just never seen so many guys with their shirts off before.’

‘Hey!’ Danny’s shout got their attention. He jerked a thumb at the glassed in DJ booth. ‘Jacks and I are just going to go say hello. Are you guys going to be okay?’

Stiles glanced around and saw that Cora and Harley already had Isaac in a dancefloor sandwich. He gave Danny a cheerful thumbs up and Danny laughed and went after Jackson.

‘Can we find somewhere to sit?’ Scott looked very uncomfortable as three guys with slicked back hair walked past him and gave him a very obvious once-over.’

‘Boyd will be here soon.’ Derek had to raise his voice to be heard over the thumping bass. Boyd had left the house when they had to go fetch Erica, Allison and Lydia from Lydia’s.

Scott looked a little appeased by that and Stiles took the opportunity to steer him over to the trio. Scott protested but Cora and Isaac grabbed him by each wrist and yanked him in and after a few minutes of awkward shuffling, he seemed to get into it and started dancing.

‘I want a drink.’ Stiles declared and Derek gave him a raised eyebrow.

‘We’re already going to be in a world of hurt if your dad and my sister find out where we are.’ He had to lean in to be heard and the warm wash of breath over his skin made Stiles shiver. It made him remember just what they had come here for and suddenly he was aware that the people around him were not just getting rid of clothing (there was a gaggle of girls near them in just bikinis) but that there was plenty of action going on once his eyes had adjusted to the dark. He looked at Derek

and cackled when he saw how constipated his face was.

‘Is it that bad?’ he asked and Derek made a face.

‘You have no idea.’ he muttered. ‘This whole place reeks and I’m not telling you of what.’

‘I can guess though.’ Stiles sidled in closer. He stared at a couple kissing frantically behind them. ‘Damn, I guess everyone was serious about that cherry popping thing.’

‘I don’t know why they’re here then.’ Derek glared at his sister as she caught his eyes and made a show of licking up the side of Isaac’s face. ‘Apart from Scott, none of them are even remotely virginal.’

‘Harley too?’ Stiles gave her a considering look.

‘Our cousin Beth came to visit last year.’ Derek sighed. ‘She and Harley spent literally all their time boning.’ He pulled an adorably confused face. ‘If that’s the correct term for lesbians.’

‘You are insane.’ Stiles cheerfully informed him. ‘Now let’s go get me that drink, Big Bad. I’m thirsty.’ He waggled his eyebrows at Derek until he caved and headed in the direction of the bar, huffing like he was being tortured.

It was cute as hell and Stiles was going to get a drink and then jump the hell out of him.

-

Laura sighed and slumped in her seat. Next to her, Tara checked her phone and then frowned at her moody face.

‘What?’ She looked at Laura expectantly.

‘This.’ Laura growled, waving a hand at the empty street. They were parked by the turn off to the preserve parking lot, a popular make out spot for the high schoolers. ‘I want to be out there, looking for her.’

‘I know.’ Tara replied. ‘But Peter and Chris have that covered.’ She grinned. ‘What’s the deal with those two anyway?’

‘Christ knows.’ Laura tapped her fingers on the steering wheel. ‘He’s been very cagey about it all. Even more than usual, and he’s sneaking around like he’s a teenager again.’ She huffed and her eyes flickered once. ‘It’s like he’s one of the pups.’

Tara glanced at her and then nodded at the empty road.

‘Speaking of pups.’ she said. ‘Have you noticed that we haven’t seen a single teenage miscreant this evening?’

‘I should think so.’ Laura growled. ‘There’s a curfew. And I told mine that if they even put a single claw outside the door after sundown, I would kick all their asses.’

‘I’m glad Harley is with them.’ Tara smiled. ‘It’s good for her to be with supernaturals. We’ve been keeping ourselves so close to ourselves, I forget she needs to kick back with other kids her age.’

‘She’s always welcome.’ Laura said. ‘I’ve somehow gained three new pack members in a month. Satomi is in stitches about this.’

‘It’s certainly an unorthodox pack.’ Tara replied. ‘You have almost as many non-wolves as you do wolves.’

‘I do.’ Laura smiled, but it was tinged with sadness. ‘My mom always said that trying to keep a pack pure ignored all the diversity of the world and was a really stupid idea. I just seem to be taking it to a bit of an extreme.’

‘Well, you have us now.’ Tara’s eyes were warm. ‘We can’t replace Aneta or Claudia but we’re not bad in a pinch. Goddess knows, we’re better than Deaton.’

‘To be fair, anyone would be better than Deaton.’ Laura snorted and they both burst out laughing.

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‘Mmmmm.’ Stiles sucked enthusiastically at the straw in his neon pink cocktail and Derek felt his jeans get a little bit tighter. Stiles mauled straws in the most obscene way imaginable and it was doing things to his head and his dick.

‘Told you.’ Lydia had the same pink cocktail, having bought a round with her fake ID. She took a dainty sip and smiled when Erica appeared behind her, not so daintily grinding up against Lydia’s ass.

‘Come on.’ She had amazing rhythm, Derek had to admit. ‘Let’s go dance.’

‘Ooh, can we?’ Stiles turned huge amber yes on him and Derek looked over at Boyd for help, trying to convey get me the fuck out of here with just his eyebrows. Boyd gave him a toothy grin in reply and turned back to his conversation with Allison, leaving Derek to curse him to the moon and back.

‘Derek hates dancing.’ Erica cackled. ‘He’s the original Debbie Downer.’

Derek gave her the finger and tried to subtly dig his heels in when Stiles grabbed his wrist and started tugging him towards the heaving mass of people. Scott was in there somewhere, bouncing around like a rubber ball on speed with Kira, who was just as smitten as he was it seemed. She’d made beeline for him when they had arrived and he had noticed how relieved Allison had looked and smelled when she had. She was busy surveying the room and talking to Boyd about perimeter alarms and booby traps, which Boyd was extremely interested in. Derek knew it was mostly so he could safeguard his greenhouse but it was also good for them to know what kind of tricks hunters had up their sleeves.

‘You’re stupid heavy.’ Stiles grumbled. ‘Come and dance with me, sourwolf.’

‘If I do, can we get some air afterwards.’ Derek countered. All the smells were making him a little nose blind and he hated it. The cherry popping was well underway it seemed, with all the bathrooms filled with couples and threesomes in some cases, and what sounded suspiciously like a full blown orgy on the roof.

‘Fine, now come on.’ Stiles tugged a little harder and Derek heaved a sigh and followed him. They found Isaac and Cora grinding on each other and Derek steered Stiles around them. That was something he didn’t need to see.

The song changed to something that he vaguely recognised but Stiles clearly loved, judging by the way he was beaming. He started flailing around, very little actual physical coordination going on until Derek started grinning in spite of himself. He started dancing, keeping his own movements to a minimum until Stiles gave him a playful shove.

‘You dance like my dad!’ he yelled and rolled his eyes at him and tried to look a little more animated. Nicky Minaj wasn’t something he usually listened to but he had to admit, the song was catchy and Stiles was flushed and smelled happy and his skin was just starting to gleam with sweat and Derek was suddenly hit by a wave of sheer want that literally took his breath away.

He found himself getting hold of Stiles by his belt loops, hauling him in and kissing him with a fervour that he normally didn’t display. Stiles was caught off balance, tripping a little so he ended up smashed against Derek’s chest. He made a soft noise that had Derek fighting the shift, his hands fisted in Derek’s henley as he all but melted into him. His mouth opened and Derek could taste the sickly sweet alcohol on his tongue and hear how Stiles’ heart started thudding even louder than the music.

It was enough to make Derek lose himself in the way Stiles smelled and tasted, easing his mouth open wider and sliding his hands up underneath Stiles’ layers. His skin was wet at the small of his back, slick and smooth under Derek’s palms. He felt himself grow bold, easing them down past the waistband of Stiles’ jeans until he was holding Stiles’ ass in both hands and getting harder by the minute. Judging by the bulge currently pressed against him, Stiles was in the same state.

He pulled back, the kiss messy enough that the lights caught the fine line of spit between them and lit up Stiles’ eyes. He blinked slowly, almost dazed.

‘Damn.’ He smiled and it was brilliant. ‘So I’m guessing that maybe cherry popping might be on the menu tonight?’

‘Jesus Christ.’ Derek bowed his head. ‘Why do I like you again?’

He had to bite off a yelp when Stiles put his hand on his cock and squeezed just right.

‘Because I do that.’ He smiled smugly. ‘Your eyes are glowing.’

‘Shit.’ Derek blinked furiously, trying to pull himself back in. Stiles’ scent had gone burnt sugar around the edges and it was hard not to pull him in and just lick him all over. ‘Suggestions?’

The smugness was replaced by a wicked grin as Stiles leaned in, his mouth just brushing Derek’s ear.

‘We find somewhere a little quieter and I show you what I can do with my mouth.’

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‘It’s so freaking hot in there.’ Jackson leaned against the railing of the catwalk that went around the top of Jungle.

‘It’s the cold blood.’ Danny smiled into his neck, breathing him in. Jackson had a very odd personal scent, a little like dry leaves. ‘You should take some clothes off.’

Jackson laughed at the blatant come on and obediently stripped off his t-shirt. Danny tucked it into his back pocket for him and then nodded at where a painting station had been set up on one of the go-go podiums.

‘How about it?’ he asked and Jackson grinned and nodded.

They left the catwalk, neither of them noticing the shadow that fell on the wall from the skylight above them. It flickered like an old film for a moment and then moved back into the dark.

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'Damn.' Stiles was pretty sure he was only a few seconds away from coming in his jeans. He was panting hard, the sound drowned out by the music even as muffled as it was. They had made it to the back of the club, where there was a mess of scaffolding and dark corners to lurk in. There were a few other couples underneath it but the darkness was thick enough that all Stiles could make out was vague shapes and sounds.

'What exactly counts as cherry popping?' Derek was smiling against his mouth. 'I mean, I hate to get heteronormative but...'

'No idea.' Stiles snickered and dragged him back in. They made out frantically for a few more moments and then broke apart again. Derek's eyes were like embers. He wasn't even bothering to try and hide it, and Stiles could feel the pinprick of claws on the soft skin of his waist. He ran a hand down Derek's chest, feeling it heave under his palm and getting a rush like nothing he'd ever felt. Everything was tingling and he felt shocky and overexcited in a way that he never had before. He looked up to see that Derek was frowning at him, startling at the odd purple glow he saw reflected in Derek's eyes.

'That's you.' Derek answered his unspoken question, looking dazed. 'Wow. They're beautiful.'

'Jesus.' Stiles grabbed him by the shirt and used all his strength to haul Derek around and press him against the wall. 'Okay, so don't freak out but I'm totally about to blow you.'

'Oh. okay.' Derek gasped and then whined when Stiles not so gracefully sank to his knees, wincing when he knocked them on the concrete floor. He slid one hand across Stiles' neck and Stiles put on his determined face and tackled Derek's jeans. He popped the button, already so turned on it was hard to focus - especially when his hand brushed over the hard line of Derek's cock. He managed to work his jeans down enough that he could get it out of the black briefs he wore and Derek whined again, throwing up one hand to grab the scaffolding above his head. It creaked alarmingly and Stiles grinned and regarded the cock in front of him. Derek was warm, velvet over steel, and smelled deep and musky. Stiles looked up and found him staring down at him, the hand on his neck tightening when Stiles leaned in and very deliberately dragged his tongue along the length of Derek's dick.

He had no personal reference point for any of it, but Stiles was nothing if not thorough in his research and he'd watched an ungodly amount of gay porn in preparation. He nosed at the crease between thigh and cock and licked again, course hair against his cheek and the thick smell making him lightheaded. Derek tasted clean, the clear slick leaking from him an odd tang on Stiles' tongue. He took the head in his mouth, sucking gently to get the feel for it. Derek growled, a deep rumble in his chest, and squeezed the scaffolding hard enough to make the metal protest. It made Stiles bold, and he sank deeper. Derek was too big to take in all at once so he used his other hand to grasp him at the base, bracing himself against his hip and starting to bob his head tentatively. It felt good, the warm slide of Derek's cock in and out of his mouth and Stiles moaned around him. That obviously felt good because Derek's hips jumped forward, choking him a little. He pulled off, coughing, and Derek made apologetic noises and clumsily patted his head. He was completely lost in it and Stiles got his breath back and started again. This time it was easier to gauge his limits and he picked up the pace, delighting in the stifled growls above him and the taste in his mouth. He sucked hard on the next pull back and that was it. Derek snarled loud enough to be heard over the music and his cock throbbed once in Stiles' hand, warm bitter come flooding his mouth. He took as much as he could, determined to keep going, and swallowed enough that when he pulled off he was only a little messy.

It didn't matter to Derek. He grabbed Stiles under the armpits and hauled him to his feet, whining and licking the residual come off his face. It was like being attacked by a slobbery puppy and Stiles giggled and wrapped both arms around Derek's neck, licking back for all he was worth.

'That was so hot.' He beamed at Derek in the dark. 'How'd I do?'

'I think you broke my brain.' Derek's hands were fumbling with Stiles' jeans. 'Can I go now, please?'

'Knock yourself out.' Stiles laughed and let Derek reverse their positions. He was completely unprepared for what it felt like though and when the air hit his dick, followed by Derek's soft, wet tongue, he had to stuff one fist in his mouth to keep from yelling. Derek was voracious, taking Stiles in much deeper and growling almost continuously. It added an extra level of sensation to the warmth of his mouth and Stiles knew he wasn't going to last long at all. He could feel it building, more intense with every passing second, and he threw his head back and let it all out. Derek's hands were brutally taught on his hips, fingers digging in as he moved fast and relentless in his need to make Stiles come and when he did, Stiles felt like his entire brain had blacked out. He groaned and grabbed Derek's hair and pulled, regardless of how it must hurt. All he could feel was a burning bright white crescendo in his head and behind his eyes and he was sure that he'd completely lost himself as he came in Derek's mouth.

It went on for far longer than normal and when the orgasm finally ebbed, Stiles opened his eyes and blinked, astonished because everything around them was pitch black. Blood rushed in his ears and he looked down and saw that the only light was from Derek's eyes.

'Holy fuck.' he croaked. 'Dude, that was intense.'

'Yeah.' Derek was dry and amused. 'I think you just blew the whole club. Pun not intended.'

'What?' Stiles had to fight to focus, still riding a tsunami of endorphins. He blinked again and realised that it wasn't just him. The entire club was in darkness and the music had cut off. People were laughing and cheering, a few lighters making bright spots in the darkness. 'Oh crap.'

'You got a little overexcited.' Derek was getting to his feet. He nuzzled Stiles' neck, completely at ease in the dark. 'Come on, we should go find the others.'

'Give me a minute.' Stiles wheezed and patted his chest. 'I just need to get my legs to work again.'

-

'Shit.' Lydia fumbled with her phone, using the torch function to light up the space around them. Next to her, Erica and Boyd lifted their hands to block out the light and she aimed it away from them. 'That wasn't natural.'

'You're telling me.' Harley appeared next to her. 'That was one hell of a magic surge.'

'The Darach?' Lydia asked and Harley shook her head.

'Stiles, I think.' She grinned. 'Don't worry, it had a distinctly happy feel to it.'

'Oh?' Erica cackled. 'Guess that's one cherry taken care of.'

'Two.' Boyd nodded at a pair of shapes that were approaching. 'I can smell it from here.'

Scott and Kira emerged from the darkness, looking like the cats that got the canary and emitting

pheromones by the bucket.

‘Where’s Stiles?’ Lydia asked and Scott shrugged.

‘He was with Derek.’ he said. ‘Where’s everyone else?’

‘We’re here.’ It was Allison. She had Cora and Isaac with her. All of them had obviously been at the painting station and were covered in lurid neon patterns.

‘So are we.’ It was Danny and Jackson and Lydia was amused to see their paint hadn’t lasted very long, completely smeared down their fronts where they had been pressed against each other.

‘Crap.’ Cora looked around and then huffed. ‘We can’t even howl for them.’

‘Not unless you want everyone to have a shitfit.’ Jackson said.

‘Don’t worry, they’ll get the generator on in a minute.’ Danny wrapped his arms around him from behind. ‘This happens more often than you’d expect.’

He never got out the rest of the word because at that moment the skylight overhead shattered in a shower of glass and a huge misshapen figure the approximate size of a bear fell through and landed on the dance floor, roaring in rage and flashing brilliant red eyes.

‘Oh Jesus!’ Lydia grabbed the closest person, who turned out to be Allison. ‘Get the fuck out! That’s the alpha!’

-

Noah hummed happily, examining his burger from several angles before figuring out how to cram it into his mouth. He didn’t normally cheat on his heart healthy diet but the stress of the past few weeks seemed like justification enough for a sneaky slip up.

He was three mouthfuls in when the radio went, Gloria on dispatch calling out a code that had his eyebrows nearly shooting off the top of his head.

‘Dispatch please say again, over.’ He already had the key turned in the ignition, his burger abandoned on the passenger seat.

‘Multiple reports of a 10-91.’ Gloria replied. ‘Sheriff, the board is lighting up.’

‘Call in Hale and Graham.’ Noah slammed his foot down and the cruiser roared down the street. ‘I think we’re going to need them!’

-

‘What the fuck?’ Stiles peered out from their hiding place under the scaffolding. All around them were people screaming and running and Derek had held him back, scared they would get trampled. He was full of conflicting emotions - anger and fear mixing together because he could hear the alpha and knew it was running rampant. He could also hear the sound of his pack, their answering snarls calling for him to go and help, but his drive to protect Stiles keeping him there.

‘Everyone’s panicking.’ He shoved Stiles further behind him. ‘I need to go help!’

‘Well, you’re not going by yourself.’ Stiles hissed, tangling their fingers together. ‘Where you go, I go!’

‘Fine.’ Derek held on tightly. ‘Let’s go.’

They moved against the crowd, struggling to get through. Everyone around them was screaming and thrashing in their panic to get out and Stiles almost lost his footing a few times. Derek had to get him back up before he was stamped on, his nostrils flaring at the stink of fear and the unmistakable smell of blood.

By the time they got to the stage, Derek could see the alpha. He felt his chest swell with pride when he saw how the wolves had her cornered, trying to keep her away from the people streaming out the club. She was on all fours, her back to the stage and snarling at them.

‘Derek!’ It was Boyd. he was shifted, his pointed ears and gold eyes just visible in the dark.

‘I got it.’ He fell into place next to him. ‘Stiles! Go find Lydia and Harley and stay with them!’

Stiles nodded, his face grim, taking off to where Derek could just see Lydia and Harley peering out from over the top of the long abandoned bar.

‘She’s feral.’ It was Allison. She was on his other side, a crossbow in her hands. Derek had no idea where she’d managed to hide it when they’d gone in and his respect for her went up enormously.

‘We have to contain her.’ he replied, shifting easily and baring his teeth at the alpha. ‘Laura will be here soon, I’m sure.’ He caught Cora’s eye and realised that they were probably going to get the grounding of a lifetime when she did.

‘We can help.’ Harley yelled from the bar.

Derek was about to tell her they were better off when suddenly something else dropped from the broken skylight and he got hit by another figure that took him right off his feet. He rolled, evading a swipe with wickedly sharp claws.

Not three feet from him, the crouched figure roared angrily and flashed blue eyes at him.

‘Fuck.’ It was Boyd. He was at Derek’s back, helping him to his feet. ‘There’s another one?’

‘Her beta.’ Derek could smell the corruption on him. ‘I think it’s Theo.’

The alpha took the opportunity then to attack and he heard the others roar in defiance and leap in to hold her back. The were in front of them did the same, leaping forward and Derek threw himself into the fight.

-

‘Holy shit.’ Stiles was gripping the edge of the bar, eyes wide as he watched. It was still so dark that he could barely see. ‘We have to do something!’

‘Witchlight.’ Harley grabbed his hand. ‘Just do what I do.’

Stiles frowned as he felt something tickle at the edge of his senses. It felt like something was being teased out of him and then he gasped when he saw licks of blue flame running down Harley’s arm to his hand. It felt unexpectedly cold and then it was on him.

‘What do we do?’ he asked and Harley stood up, taking him with her.

‘At her.’ she directed, lifting her free hand. Stiles copied her stance and then the fire was flowing from their fingers. It moved like water, the alpha and cutting her off from the others. She roared in

anger but the circle of flame was holding her inside as surely as if it had been mountain ash.

Across from them, Derek and Boyd charged the beta and there was an anguished yelp as they brought him down. They had him pinned to the ground and with the alpha inside the fire, it seemed as if they had the upper hand.

That was when Lydia tipped her head back and screamed.

-

Laura was out the door of the cruiser almost before she had the vehicle stopped. She ran, the neon green club sign in sight but there were teenagers still streaming out the door, screaming and crying and grabbing at her as she tried to push her way through. Her pack bonds were thrumming and she knew that in spite of her warnings, her pack had been disobedient little shits and gotten themselves right in the thick of it.

She shoved a pair of terrified boys out her way and then skidded to stop. The front of Jungle had been cleared and standing there was a hooded figure, a crumpled body at their feet. Laura felt her skin crawl, the stink of magic gone wrong in her nose. She shifted, her eyes red as she growled in warning.

‘You.’ She crouched, claws out. ‘You’re the Darach.’

The figure lifted scarred white hands to push back their hood, revealing a face so terribly scarred and misshapen that it made what Peter had looked like seem pale in comparison. Her face, and the only reason Laura knew it was a woman was from her scent, was scarred and her mouth lifted unnaturally at one corner.

‘Alpha.’ Her voice vibrated with power. ‘Yes, you’ll do nicely.’

‘I don’t think so.’ Laura snarled. She could hear Tara behind her and moved so they were flanking the Darach. Tara’s eyes were white and she had eldritch fire waving through her fingers.

‘Go.’ she said to Laura. ‘I’ll handle this.’

‘Do you really think so, witch?’ The Darach sneered at them. ‘I seriously doubt you can match me.’

‘Only one way to find out.’ Tara spat and threw a wreath of fire at her. The Darach laughed and swept it away with her own gesture, then threw a wave of power back at them that was so strong it lifted them right off their feet and threw them against the wall behind them.

Laura yelped when she hit the bricks, landing hard. Her ribs were cracked but she was already healing when she got up. The Darach was lifting the unconscious teen from the floor, a young man that Laura didn’t recognise.

‘I’m so sorry I can’t stay.’ Her voice was mocking. ‘But I really do have to fly.’

With that she stamped a foot and lifted right off the ground, soaring up and into the darkness.

‘Goddammit!’ Laura roared. She ran to Tara, who was cradling her arm. ‘Are you alright?’

‘It’s broken.’ Tara’s face was pained. ‘Go! The alpha is still inside.’

Laura whined and looked past her. She could hear the sound of another cruiser and so she did as

Tara said, hurtling towards the club and through the door. It was carnage inside, furniture overturned and broken glass crunching beneath her boots.

Her pack was all there and she skidded to a stop by Derek and Boyd. They had a were pinned to the ground, holding him as he fought furiously to get loose. Behind them she saw Stiles and Harley behind the bar, their hands outstretched and pouring a loop of blue fire around the alpha. The rest of her pack was standing around the alpha, all shifted and ready to attack if needed.

‘Laura!’ It was Danny. He and Allison had Lydia between them. She was half collapsed, her eyes and hair white.

‘She screamed.’ It was Jackson. His face was scaled and Laura had to step back to avoid his lashing tail.

‘It was the Darach.’ She moved to look at the alpha. ‘She’s taken another sacrifice.’

‘Fuck.’ Jackson looked at the alpha. ‘What do we do with her?’

‘We wait for backup.’ Laura replied, taking out her phone. She glanced at the bar. ‘Can you both hold her?’

‘For a while.’ Harley said. ‘Stiles is like a damn superpowered battery.’

Laura nodded and fired off a quick message to Noshiko and Peter. She went back to Derek and Boyd and regarded the snarling beta.

‘It’s Theo.’ Derek had Theo’s arm twisted behind his back and she was proud of the way he was keeping him immobilised.

‘Kate turned him.’ Boyd growled. ‘He’s as fucked up as she is.’

Laura knelt down, her eyes flaring. He knew what she needed to do and just prayed that it would break Kate’s hold. Theo was a coyote all right. She could smell the difference under the layers of dirt and blood. She laid a hand on his shoulder and he snapped his fangs at her.

‘Theo.’ She let the alpha voice bleed into her words. ‘Enough!’

Theo writhed and raked his claws along the floor. He wasn’t giving an inch and Laura knew that Kate’s hold on him was like iron. The only way he’d probably submit was if they killed her, but Laura would have to break him.

The sound of a car pulling up had her lifting her head. Noshiko came in, her hair lifted on her aura. She moved to Laura’s side, checking for Kira. Having seen her, she moved to stand next to her daughter. Inside the wall of fire, Kate roared and Noshiko met her ire with a flash of orange eyes.

‘Miss Argent.’ She looked at Allison. ‘Do you have anything we could use to disable her?’

‘I have wolfsbane quarrels.’ Allison replied. ‘But that will kill her.’

‘Hmmm.’ Noshiko frowned. ‘In that case...’

She gently shooed Erica and Isaac aside and glanced back at Stiles and Harley.

‘Let her out.’ she said, her voice perfectly calm.

Laura had to suppress a smile at how they looked to her for approval. She was going to rip them all

new ones for being out but she was damn proud of how they were all working as a pack.

‘Do it.’ she said. ‘And get back, all of you.’

Harley lowered her hand and Stiles followed suit. The fore died away and Kate tensed, ready to spring. She made it off the ground but not much further because Noshiko let loose a bolt of lightning that hit her right in the chest. It threw Kate back to the ground, landing with a thud and staying there. Smoke curled from her filthy fur and it reeked. Everyone wrinkled their noses and Laura got up to go stand next to Noshiko.

‘What do we do with her?’ she asked.

‘We take her in.’ It was Chris. He was walking in, Peter at his side. He went to Allison first, giving her a quick check over before crossing to what had once been his sister. He shoved her with the toe of his boot, none too gently Laura noted. ‘The Council can deal with her now.’

‘No.’ Noshiko said. ‘Your human Council will simply put her away. We must hand her over to Deucalion.’

‘He’ll kill her.’ Chris said. ‘I can’t allow that.’

‘It is our right.’ Laura met his eyes. ‘She’s a feral alpha who has killed on my territory. Not for the first time either. She killed my pack as well as an innocent. You know the laws on that, Chris.’

Chris opened his mouth as if to protest but Allison beat him to it.

‘She’s right, Dad.’ She nodded at Kate. ‘She needs to be put down.’

Chris drooped. To Laura’s surprise it was Peter who went to comfort him, an arm around his waist.

‘We will take her.’ Noshiko nodded at Kira. ‘But we will need help to get her out of here.’

‘Well.’ Laura drew herself up and flashed her eyes at her pack, who all whined and shrunk in on themselves because they were well aware that she wasn’t pleased with them. ‘It’s a good thing I have all these helpers who will be more than pleased to lend a hand.’

As if by providence, the generators decided to kick in at that very moment and they all winced as the club was flooded with light. Laura took in the state of them, some barely dressed and covered in paint. She gave Derek a penetrating look as the smells started to register as well, raising her eyebrows when she caught the unmistakable smell of come on him and realised it wasn’t his own.

‘Do I even want to know?’ she asked and he whined and bowed his head, ears going scarlet.

‘Oops.’ Stiles was looking at the door and trying to make himself as small as possible and Laura would have bet her entire paycheck on just whose come was all over her baby brother.

‘Stiles?’ Noah was looking around at the devastation as he came in, weapon drawn and his eyes like dinner plates. ‘What the fuck happened here?’ he stopped abruptly when he saw Kaye lying on the ground and took in the still snarling Theo. ‘Jesus fuck!’

‘Just another Friday night in Beacon Hills, Boss.’ Laura quipped and sniggered when Lydia rolled her eyes at her.

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

HERE BE ANGST! T/W noncon. See end notes for details.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

‘So. Anyone want to explain this clusterfuck?’ Laura had her arms folded and her stern parent face was even better than Noah’s. He had to admire how she didn’t even need to raise her voice to have every wolf in the room shrinking in on themselves, although the red eyes and fangs did help.

He watched how Stiles was studiously avoiding his eyes and sighed. They were all at the station, every one of the little misfits crammed into one of the interrogation rooms, while he watched from the observation room as Laura gave them a dressing down. She had wanted a very thorough rundown of just what had happened at the club and now they were all tired and cranky and wanted to go home.

‘Laura...’ Lydia started and Laura growled at her. It wasn’t anything even close to human and Lydia flinched, her own eyes misting over white and her mouth settling into an angry line.

‘Don’t.’ Laura snarled. ‘I trusted you to make sure they weren’t in trouble.’

‘I’m not their goddamn mother, Laura.’ Lydia snapped. ‘And in case you forgot, they’re my friends and I’m in high school. We’re allowed this.’

Now it was Laura’s turn to be taken aback and Noah senses a shift in the room. The kids were all looking between them, their faces stricken.

‘Come on guys.’ Derek tried, his voice soft and tentative. ‘Look, it was all our fault. We all decided to go.’

‘Yeah. It was a group effort. Don’t blame Lydia for not stopping us.’ Boyd chimed in. He was at Derek’s shoulder, Erica pressed up against his side. Isaac and Cora were on the other side, Stiles and Harley rounding out the group with Scott. The new girl that had been introduced as Kira had left with her mother, after brief introductions had been made. Allison had gone home with Chris and Jackson and Danny had left with Peter to help with keeping Kate and Theo contained.

Laura shot them a furious look and they both went quiet.

‘I know that.’ she replied. ‘You think I’m not aware of how you operate like your own little mafia when I’m not around. Normally, I don’t make a big deal out of it but tonight I specifically told all of you to stay put. This is a dangerous situation and you know better than to go getting in the middle of shit you can’t handle.’

‘That’s just it though.’ Cora pointed out. ‘We were handling it. Kate’s in custody because we handled it.’

‘Kate’s in custody because you got lucky and had superior numbers.’ Laura bit back. ‘But the Darach is running around with another teenager, who is probably going to turn up dead tomorrow. That whole damn party was irresponsible and stupid and I’m so disappointed in all of you for

going.'

Noah turned as the door opened and Tara came in.

'She's good,' he said, going back to the scene in front of him. 'She does all the interrogations from now on. Those teeth are enough to make hardened perps shit themselves.'

'Yeah,' Tara came to stand next to him. 'We got an ID on the kid. He's a senior named Nathan Pierce. His parents are coming in to talk to us. They didn't even know he'd snuck out. Poor kid is part of the local Baptist congregation and enrolled in their TLW programme so no guesses as to why she took him.'

'Shit,' Noah dragged a hand over his face. 'Well, best not to give them any hope.'

'She's a serious threat,' Tara mused, staring through the two way mirror. 'He's on the lacrosse team, athletic and seemingly strong enough to fight off an attack but she's got a kick like a mule.'

Noah gave her a speculative glance.

'Are you alright?' he asked and she nodded, smiling ruefully at him.

'It still hurts but that's the magic. The bone will be knitting for a while.'

Noah nodded, remembering how Harley had knelt and directed Stiles to help her heal Tara's broken arm. He thought back to the two of them behind the bar, blue fire shooting from their hands and looked back at his son. As if he could feel Noah's attention fix on him, Stiles looked up and met his eyes through the mirror, then looked away and bit his lip. It was a classic guilty tell and Noah knew that he at least felt bad for his part in what had happened.

'I don't know how to reconcile any of it sometimes,' he admitted. 'This has all been so fast and so much to get to grips with. I can't help feeling angry sometimes that Claudia didn't even give me so much as a heads up.'

'He's a good kid,' Tara laid her good hand on his arm. 'He's powerful but that comes with the territory. You'll get used to it. He's got a pack to ground him now and he's learning how to use it. If anything, he's probably better equipped to deal with the danger than you are.'

'Well, that's not going to stop me from grounding his ass and Scott's for the next week,' Noah huffed and she laughed, nodding agreement.

'Me either,' she said and smiled at her daughter's look of sudden outrage. 'Harley's listening in by the way.'

Noah frowned and then looked very unsettled.

'Tell her not to teach him to do that,' he said. 'It's bad enough the little shit listens in on official calls.'

'Ten four,' Tara laughed. 'Although it may be too late.'

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Inside the interrogation room, Derek wanted to sink below the edge of the table and hide. Laura was using her disappointed voice and that was by far the worst. He could feel the way they were all submitting, ashamed to have lost their alpha's faith, even temporarily. The only one still being

openly defiant was Lydia, and her fury sliced through white hot and vibrating through the pack bond at a pitch that hurt his ears. She was still getting in Laura's face, her eyes white and her hair starting to float.

'Just because you're the alpha, doesn't mean you take everything on yourself.' she was saying. 'What if something happens to you, huh? You think we're just going to let it lie?'

'Of course not.' Laura huffed. 'But I do expect you to do what I ask without trying to put yourselves in danger at every turn.'

'We're a pack.' Lydia folded her arms even tighter. 'And we did damn well tonight. Just say thank you and stop trying to control every fucking thing around you. It didn't save your parents and it won't save us either.'

There was a collective gasp and Derek whined, feeling like he'd been punched in the gut. They didn't talk much about Laura's control freak tendencies because they knew why she was the way she was, but Lydia wasn't a wolf and she hadn't lost her pack. This was a line too far and she obviously knew it by the way her face went white when Laura's eyes burned and brighter and she completely shifted to beta form.

'Enough!' she roared. 'I want you all to go the fuck home and stay there. I mean it!'

'Laura...' Lydia started, her voice stricken, but Laura simply held a hand up and swept out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

'Oh fuck.' Cora slumped on the table. 'She's mad as hell.'

'I know.' Isaac nuzzled her hair, looking like a puppy that had been kicked. 'She's going to ground us forever.'

'She can't.' Erica was gnawing on a scarlet nail. 'We're all over eighteen.'

'Like that will stop her.' Cora muttered. 'And some of us aren't.'

'Oh crap.' Stiles looked across at him and Derek met his eyes. 'I'm guessing we're all in shit.'

'You got that right, kid.' It was Noah. He'd opened the door and was leaning inside. 'Come on. I'm taking you and Scott home. Harley, your mom needs to go to the hospital so Melissa can just check her over. Can you drive her?'

'Sure.' Harley got up, giving them all a small smile. 'I guess I'll see you guys later.'

Stiles stood up and gave his father a truly pathetic look. Noah rolled his eyes at him, getting Scott by the shoulder as he passed and steering him out.

'One minute.' he said and shut the door.

Derek stood up and the others moved aside to let him get to Stiles. He felt fiercely grateful for them at that moment, even as Stiles stepped in close to him and looked up at him through his lashes, amber eyes huge.

Derek gave him a small secretive smile and leaned in to rest their foreheads together.

'What you did tonight was amazing,' he whispered and Stiles' cheeks went pink, his scent tinged with sugar.

'You were you.' he replied. 'I've never seen you fight before.'

Derek shrugged and nosed at him.

'Text me when you get home?' he asked and Stiles nodded and then pressed a quick hard kiss to his mouth. Derek let him go reluctantly and Stiles left. He waited until the door was closed before sighing when he looked at Lydia. She had moved to stare through the two way mirror and anyone else would have been fooled by the blank mask she wore, but he could smell the telltale scent of salt and knew she wasn't.

He went to her, putting a hand on her shoulder.

'She's just pissed off right now.' he said softly. 'She'll get over it.'

'I was out of line.' Lydia pressed her lips together so hard they went colourless. 'I'm sorry.'

'You weren't wrong though.' Derek told her. 'It's just that we never say it out loud.'

'I should have known better.' Lydia closed her eyes and when she opened them again, they were back to green. 'I got carried away and we were all put in danger.'

'This wasn't on you.' Derek tried to protest but she shook her head.

'You did say it was a bad idea.' She shrugged, looking small and sad. 'I should have listened to you.'

'I didn't exactly put up a fight.' Derek sighed. 'None of us did.'

'And if it was your fault, then it was also mine.' Erica was now on her other side, looping her arm through Lydia's.

'And mine.' Boyd said. 'I knew what you were up to and didn't step in either.'

'Us too.' Isaac said and Cora nodded.

'I pretty much threatened you so I could come with.' She looked at Derek and the unspoken agreement was there instantly. 'Laura will just have to deal.'

Lydia's mouth quirked.

'I'm still not your goddamn mother.' she replied and Derek smirked and bumped her gently.

'Sure, you are.' he said. 'After Laura, who do you think we listen to the most?'

'Shut up.' Lydia snorted but she was starting to smell pleased again. Derek grinned and it only took a look from him before they were all crowding around her while she squawked in protest.

-

Noah pulled up outside the house. He cut the engine and turned to give them both a stern look. In the back seat, Stiles and Scott leaned into each other and tried to look innocent. It was somewhat ridiculous and Noah heaved a heartfelt sigh and then jabbed a finger at the house.

'Inside, in bed and no arguments.' He eyeballed them for good measure. 'And not a peep out of either of you. Tomorrow, you're staying inside the property boundary and doing yard work until I think you've served enough time. Capishe?'

‘Yeah.’ Stiles nudged Scott and he quickly nodded. ‘Dad...I...’

‘Scott.’ Noah looked at his step-son. ‘Can you give us a minute, kid? Go inside and call your mom. She was worried.’

Scott looked mildly terrified and obeyed, trudging towards the house like a man going to his execution. Noah waited until he was inside before turning back to Stiles and raising an eyebrow.

‘We can produce jets of flame now?’ he asked. ‘Are you sure you’re not actually a dragon?’

‘No?’ Stiles was doing that thing with the tapping of his fingers that he did when he was trying to weasel out of something. ‘At least, I don’t think so? Harley says it’s quite easy for witches to do.’

‘It was pretty damn impressive, I’ll give you that.’ Noah said. ‘As was the healing thing. That could really come in handy.’

‘Yeah.’ Stiles brightened. ‘That was super cool. It felt really good too.’

‘You’re a firecracker, kid.’ Noah couldn’t help but smile. ‘But please, promise me you’ll use your power for good.’

‘With great power comes great responsibility.’ Stiles quipped and then his smile faltered. ‘Laura said the Darach took another kid.’

‘Yeah.’ Noah rubbed at his eyes. ‘We’ve called his parents but I think we both know how it’s going to turn out.’

Stiles’ lower lip wobbled for a moment before he took a deep breath and looked more serious than Noah had seen him look for a while.

‘I’m sorry.’ he said. ‘I lied to you and I did something that put me in danger. I promise I won’t do it again.’

Noah had to hide his smile.

‘You shouldn’t make promises you can’t keep.’ he replied. ‘We both know that if your friends are in trouble, you’re going to be front and centre with them. Especially if Derek is involved.’

‘I guess.’ Stiles looked crestfallen. ‘I just feel like I’m starting to let you down again just when we...’ He trailed off and looked hopelessly at Noah. ‘I don’t want things to go back to the way they were.’

‘They’re not going to.’ Noah replied. ‘But I don’t want you taking any unnecessary risks either, magic notwithstanding. The Darach is so powerful she got away from Tara and Laura with a full grown teenage boy on her shoulder. She broke Tara’s arm just by throwing her through the air. I don’t want you thinking that you can take that kind of shit on when two experienced adults with a wealth of power between the two of them came off second best.’

Stiles opened his mouth as if to say something and then shut it.

‘You’re right.’ He wrinkled his nose in annoyance. ‘I get it. No more shenanigans.’

‘Thank you.’ Noah nodded at the house. ‘Now get to bed. I was serious about that yard work.’

The pack piled out of the cruiser, all apart from Lydia who had gone home by herself. The chill between her and Laura had been noticeable and Laura was quiet all the way back to the house. She said nothing, even when they got out. Peter was waiting on the porch for them and he gently herded them inside. The sound of the cruiser's tires tearing up the dirt as she drove off was all the goodbye they got.

Once inside, they split up and headed for bed. Peter walked them upstairs and then kept going until he and Derek were alone in his room.

'She's angry,' he said and Derek sighed, flopping down on his bed.

'I know.' He sat up and looked at Peter, brows knitting. 'She and Lydia kind of got into it as well.'

'That explains her snotty attitude on the phone earlier.' Peter made a face. 'As if I can be in two places at once to keep an eye on all of you.'

He came to sit down next to Derek, putting an arm around him. Derek knew why and leaned into his warmth, thankful for the comfort of his pack.

'What's going to happen to her now?' he asked, his voice small.

'Jackson very generously donated some venom to the cause.' Peter replied. 'She's very susceptible to it and it will keep her quiet. She shifted back after a while and let me tell you, she has not had a shower for quite some time.'

'What about Theo?' Derek asked. 'I mean, he's an asshole but it's not exactly his fault he got bit.'

'It is actually.' Peter retorted. 'If he and his little band of miscreants hadn't been chasing Scott through the preserve then he'd never have got in her way. Still, you're not entirely wrong on that count. Noshiko thinks he would benefit from some time away from her to break the bond between them and then maybe integration with his own kind.'

'He's not a wolf.' Derek said. 'I could smell that much.'

'Coyote.' Peter's expression darkened. 'Let me tell you, we'll be better off having him far from here. Coyotes are nuts.'

'Didn't you date one for a while?' Derek couldn't resist the gentle tease and was pleased when Peter snorted with laughter.

'I did,' he replied. 'Let's just say I learned my lesson.' He ruffled Derek's hair. 'Now you need to get some sleep. Having sex will wear you out.'

Derek swiped at him but Peter dodged neatly.

'Is everyone going to mention that every five minutes,' he muttered and Peter laughed.

'You smell like Stiles came all over you and then rolled on you for good measure,' he said. 'Maybe shower first.'

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Laura drove like crazy through the preserve. She was still seething from her confrontation with Lydia and she needed to get out and get some air in her nose and earth beneath her feet.

She pulled off the service road into a dirt lot, stopping the cruiser and turning off the engine. It

ticked as it cooled and she rested her forehead on the steering wheel, wishing that she hadn't left things the way she had. It was too late now and she and Lydia were both hot tempered and stubborn enough to not apologise when they snapped. This was probably going to take a couple of days to cool down. She got out and moved to the back of the cruiser. She kept her duffle in there with a spare set of clothes and a couple of other things. It took no time at all to strip off her uniform and put on the leggings and sports bra, pulling her BHPD t-shirt over it but leaving her feet bare. All of them enjoyed running barefoot, feeling more connected to their territory that way.

She started out hard, pounding the ground as she loped along. Her usual circuit would be the northern side of the lake where the Nemeton grew and she headed that way, letting all her anger out in the run. All her senses were on alert as she ran, picking up the familiar sounds of the preserve and the growing light of dawn making it easier and easier to see.

It wasn't too far from the Nemeton when she felt something come over her. At first it simply seemed like she was tiring from pushing herself so hard, but as Laura got closer she started to feel lightheaded and slowed to a trot. Ahead of her, she could just make out the clearing and when she got to it, it felt like she was coming out of a dream. Everything seemed to slow down and she shook her head, trying to clear it. The clearing was as she expected, although the small green shoots proliferating the surface of the stump was something she hadn't expected. Part of her brain screamed that it was not normal and she should be on alert, but then a warm wave came over and she lost all sense of alarm.

'You're strong. But no matter, you'll soon be mine' The words came from a woman draped across the stump. She was lovely, an angelic face with soft waves of brown hair and big grey eyes framed with thick lashes. Her pink lips curved upwards in a knowing smile and she sat up, the flowing white robe she wore shifting to reveal creamy pale skin and long legs.

Laura felt everything fade away, the pack bays dimming into silence in the back of her head. The woman's scent filled her nose, sweet and inviting. She felt inexplicably drawn to her and took a step forward, the shift coming on suddenly as if she was a cub with no control at all.

'That's right.' The woman's eyes gleamed. 'My big strong alpha wolf. There's enough spark in you to fuel a dozen Nemeta. Once I have what I want, it will be all at my disposal and then I can take my revenge against that entire family.'

She leaned back, spreading her legs and reaching up to pull the robe away from her breasts. Laura lifted her head, scenting the air and growling when she smelled the woman's lush arousal. Something in the back of her head scratched at her to stop, to run in the opposite direction as fast and as far as possible but then another wave of warm syrupy lassitude came over her and the woman's scent intensified. She let her knees fall open, baring the shiny pinkness between her legs.

'Come to me, Alpha.' she demanded and Laura was powerless to resist.

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Derek woke up to the buzzing of his phone. He blinked blearily and fumbled around for it, accidentally hitting Peter. His uncle had stayed with him, talking over the procedure that would see Kate Argent pay for her crimes and then falling asleep next to him. He stirred but didn't wake and Derek got out of bed and stumbled across to his window. He eased it open and climbed out, shimmying along the edge of the roof until he could sit comfortably, swiping his thumb across the screen that had Stiles making a goofy face on it.

'Shouldn't you be sleeping?' he asked, his voice rough.

'Pot, kettle.' Stiles sounded like he was shaking. 'I felt weird and woke up and then I got this really strong feeling like something wasn't right so I had to call you.'

'No.' Derek rubbed one eye. 'I'm fine. We all got back and everyone else is sleeping.' He tuned into the heartbeats of his pack below him, tracking each one easily and feeling comforted when they were all accounted for.

'Really?' Stiles sounded worried and it woke Derek up properly. 'Okay. I just can't kick the feeling that something's going on through.'

'It might be delayed stress from last night.' Derek said, shifting so he could watch the sun starting to peek over the trees. 'Not our finest hour. Have you called your dad?'

'Yeah.' Stiles huffed. 'And Melissa. Scott's out like a light. The only person I haven't spoken to is Lydia, but she's got her phone off.'

'It's probably that.' Derek said. 'Her and Laura fighting throws off the pack bonds like crazy. It's probably what's got you so worried.'

'I guess.' He could hear Stiles lying back down. 'I still don't like it though. Just for the record.'

'Noted.' Derek smiled. 'Hey, how about I distract you?'

'What you got, Big Bad?' Stiles asked and Derek could hear the smile creeping into his voice.

'How about I tell you about the time I got treed by a skunk when I was ten?' he said and heard Stiles muffle a bonafide giggle.

'I think I remember that.' He sounded delighted. 'Yeah, you got stuck up this huge pine and cried for an hour while I went to go get our moms. Then she had to coax you down with raw steak.'

'Mmmm.' Derek thought about steak.

'Yeah.' Stiles was definitely smirking. 'You always would do anything for steak. Has that changed?'

'A bit.' Derek smiled again, now fully aware he probably looked as smitten as hell. 'Now I'd do anything for you.'

'Oh my God.' Stiles sounded scandalised. 'You asshole. You can't give me my first blowjob and land a sucker punch like that on me in one night.'

'It could be your second blowjob later if you play your cards right.' Derek said, going red at his own daring.

'Jesus Christ.' Stiles grumbled. 'Now I'm worried and I have a boner. Thanks for that.'

'You're welcome.' Derek laughed and leaned into the first sunbeam as it broke the horizon.

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Downstairs, Peter absently rubbed at his chest. Something wasn't sitting right and he wondered if it was residual heartburn from the truly awful late night take out Chris had conned him into eating. He reached for his phone, still stuck in his jeans pocket, and blinked at the screen. There were three missed calls from what he knew was Noah's cell. Frowning, he rang back.

‘Peter.’ Noah sounded a little stressed. ‘Are you at the pack house?’

‘Yes.’ He sat up, half listening to Derek laughing as he spoke to Stiles above him. His nephew had been laughing a lot lately and Peter hadn’t realised just how much he’d missed the sound of it.

‘Why?’

‘Laura was supposed to come back to the station after she’d dropped the kids off.’ Noah replied. ‘She hasn’t turned up and she’s not answering her radio or cell.’

‘She’s alright though.’ Peter said. ‘I’d feel it if not.’ He absently reached out through the pack bond and found her, still as steadfast as always.

‘Then where the hell is she?’ Noah asked and Peter had to admit that he had no idea.

‘Derek said that she and Lydia had a fight at the station.’ he replied. ‘She’s probably just running it off. She does that.’

‘So I shouldn’t worry?’ Noah asked and Peter smiled at his obvious concern.

‘Worry when I worry.’ he told him. ‘She’ll turn up.’

‘Okay. Thanks.’ Noah said goodbye and hung up and Peter sat for a minute. Laura being out for a run wasn’t something extraordinary. She probably wanted to clear her head and check the territory line and that was why she was not answering her radio or cell.

‘Derek.’ He stood up and stretched. ‘I’m going to go find your sister. When you’ve finished chewing Stiles’ ear off, please can you make breakfast.’

‘Sure.’ Derek replied and kept on talking. Peter huffed affectionately at him and left the room. He checked in on Cora and Isaac, curled up together in Cora’s bed. Erica and Boyd were in the spare room in much the same position, except that Boyd’s eyes opened when he cracked one the door.

‘Everything okay?’ he asked and Peter nodded.

‘I’m going to go run Laura down.’ he replied. ‘She hasn’t gone back to the station and Noah needs her.’

‘Hang on.’ Boyd slid out from under Erica’s arm. He was in his boxers and a tank top but it took only a minute to pull on his jeans. ‘I’ll go with you.’

‘You know I can take care of myself.’ Peter quipped and Boyd raised an eyebrow at him. ‘Fine. Just try and keep up.’

‘You keep up, old man.’ Boyd retorted with a rare mischievous grin and Peter chuckled as they tussled down the stairs.

Once outside, they set off at a steady lope. Peter followed his nose and his instincts to the pathway that led to the Nemeton, Boyd to his right. It took them about fifteen minutes to run the whole way and as they got to the Nemeton, Peter slowed. His nose caught scent of something that wasn’t right and he stopped, placing a hand to Boyd’s chest and letting out a tiny subsonic growl that had Boyd freezing in place.

He hadn’t encountered the Darach yet, but Laura had called him and given him a rundown and the clearing ahead smelled like magic. It wasn’t like Stiles or even Tara and Harley. This was herbaceous and had tones of damp earth threaded through it. When he took his first step into the

clearing, Peter could suddenly see why.

The Nemeton was sprouting. Not just sprouting but positively blooming. Green shoots crowded the stump, their leaves reaching for the sunlight that was starting to filter through the trees.

‘Holy shit.’ Boyd said next to him. ‘That is not what I expected to see.’

‘No.’ Peter skirted the stump, sniffing cautiously. ‘This is definitely not supposed to happen.’

‘Do you think it’s Stiles?’ Boyd asked, skirting the other way until they met on the other side. ‘Derek said that he’s connected to it.’

‘I think that and our friendly neighbourhood Darach coming to town.’ Peter said. ‘They’re both powerful, Stiles just less controlled. Laura said he and Harley were using magic last night.’

‘They were.’ Boyd reached out and twisted a tendril around his finger. They both watched in fascination as it seemed to grow even as they looked at it, wrapping itself around Boyd’s finger.

‘Okay, that’s even more unusual.’ Peter moved to inspect the tendril. He narrowed his eyes at it and then snapped a piece off, stifling a noise when he saw and smelled what seeped out of the plant.

‘Oh fuck.’ Boyd was staring in disgust at the red fluid on Peter’s fingers. ‘Is that...?’

‘Blood?’ Peter nodded grimly. ‘Yes, it is.’

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Laura pulled up outside the apartment block she’d been directed to. It was mundane looking, the grass trimmed neatly and the siding a boring shade of beige.

‘Thank you.’ Jennifer leaned over and pulled her into a kiss. ‘You’ll call me later?’

‘Of course.’ Laura let herself be kissed. She was still feeling a little muzzy but when she’d woken up in Jennifer’s arms it had been like the clouds had cleared and suddenly everything was right with the world. She didn’t know why she hadn’t realised just how perfect they were for each other before, but then again this was the first time they were actually meeting.

‘I should go in.’ Jennifer said, smiling at her. ‘You need to get back to the station. Maybe you could come by after your shift ends and I’ll make us some food. We can snuggle on the couch. You’d like that.’

‘I would love that.’ Laura beamed at her. Jennifer really was the most perfect woman. ‘I’ll be over right after I’m done.’

‘Good.’ Jennifer opened her door. ‘And then you can tell me all about your day too. I bet you can’t wait to get everything off your chest. It must be such a burden to carry.’

‘It is.’ Laura was filled with relief. ‘If you want, I can sneak the case files out too. You can help me go over them.’

‘Sounds perfect.’ Jennifer blew her a kiss through the window. ‘See you later, beautiful.’

Laura smiled at her as she walked up and into the apartment block, hardly able to believe her luck. She was going to float through the rest of the day, buoyed along on the knowledge that she’d just met the woman she was going to make her mate.

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Lydia felt it in her diaphragm first, a tug that was sharp enough to have her lose her breath. It was horrible, the sensation growing as she sat up in bed. The next pull made her cry out, the pain like someone was stabbing her in the heart. She scrabbled desperately for her phone, dialling the one person who was always her go to when she needed help.

‘Lydia?’ Jackson’s voice was thick with sleep. ‘What’s wrong?’

Lydia couldn’t speak, the pain too much to even focus on his words as she started crying, great heaving sobs that made her shake with inexplicable dread.

She could hear Jackson talking to Danny, then him shouting down the line that they were on their way. She curled in on herself, sobbing as if her heart was breaking because it truly felt like it was being ripped out of her. She felt for the bond that she held so dear and which never wavered, even through their worst disagreements and when she grasped at nothing was when Lydia truly knew something terrible had happened and started screaming.

Chapter End Notes

Jennifer seduces Laura into having sex with her using magic (non explicit). She also breaks the mate bond between Laura and Lydia after deciding that she is going to use Laura's alpha spark to wake up the Nemeton properly so she can absorb its power.

Also an additional rant so please feel free to skip this: I am old and tired so please don't come and yell at me because you read a properly tagged story and it made you have a rage fit. Especially don't come and tell at me, after the first shitty comment when I suggest you stop reading because you are clearly not having a Good Time™, that I quote fucked up your mental health. I am nobody's mother by choice and I am nobody's free therapist either.

This story will now be locked and comments moderated because ain't nobody got time for the lack of reading comprehension and maturity that entails. If you are a minor reading this, IT IS TAGGED EXPLICIT FOR A REASON and it is not for you.

Ditto unsolicited crit. I don't care what you think your intellectual entitlement is to tell me what I've done wrong, don't drop your smug flexes in my inbox. I'm sure as hell not going to listen to them.

Thank you to all those of you who are categorically not assholes. I write pour vous🙄🙄🙄

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Things are started to speed up!!!

‘What about these?’ Derek asked and Stiles shrugged. They were in the greenhouse, working off their mutual grounding. Well, Stiles was working while Derek perched on the workbench and watched him. Noah had relented the evening before on the ‘no company’ rule and so Scott and Kira were inside the house, playing Mario Kart and giggling, according to Derek. He had volunteered to be Stiles’ gardening assistant and so there they were, dirt under their nails as Stiles repotted some of the out of control plants from inside. He’d shown Derek where he’d found the pendant and they’d both paged through some of his grandmother’s books, squinting at the pictures and trying to marry them up with the spells in Aneta’s journal. Derek had been a great help. He knew a lot about plants and what he didn’t know, Boyd did. There had been a lot of texting back and forth. He was holed up with Erica at his house and Isaac and Cora were at the pack house under Peter’s watchful eye.

‘I’m not sure about them yet.’ He rubbed a silky green leaf between his fingers. ‘What does the super sniffer say?’ He snickered at his alliteration and Derek bared a fang at him. He did sniff the plant though, going a little cross eyed before he let out a very dramatic sneeze.

‘No idea.’ He snapped a picture with his phone and Stiles knew it would end up in Boyd’s hands to identify.

Stiles hummed thoughtfully. He’d realised that a lot of the stylised flowers he’d had tattooed on his arms were ones from the green house and that they all had magical properties and decided that if he was going to be able to seriously help, instead of just letting Harley use him as a giant human battery, he needed to start learning about them.

Derek seemed to pick up on his change in mood and tilted his head at him.

‘What?’ he asked and Stiles nodded down at his forearms, bared in his Captain America t-shirt.

‘That’s angelica.’ He ran a fingertip along a delicate vine with tiny white flowers. ‘It’s for protection against negative influences. These ones are hawthorn and the purple ones are mandrake.’

‘And hawthorn is for what?’ Derek asked, taking one of Stiles hands and turning it palm up so he could inspect the tattoos a little more closely.

‘Successful spell casting. The mandrake is for control.’ Stiles watched him. ‘It’s insane right? How the hell did I know to even ask for these particular flowers.’

‘You also have irises.’ Derek said. ‘I know those from my mom. She used to grow them in the garden.’

‘For wisdom and courage.’ Stiles gave him a half smile. ‘Guess I was kind of destined for this, wasn’t I?’

‘The Nemeton clearly had ideas.’ Derek agreed. ‘It feels...stronger.’

‘Yeah.’ Stiles had noticed that the pull was clearer than before. He could almost feel the magic seeping into him through the ground. It was like an electric buzz under his skin but at the same time, Stiles could almost feel it making him focus, guiding his hands as he moved around the greenhouse and put things in place.

The weekend had been sombre. The body of the teenager that the Darach had taken had been found on Saturday. He was floating face down in the swimming pool at the high school, his throat cut and clearly another of her sacrifices. School had been closed again until the entire place could be examined and Noah had passed a comment at dinner that he was almost as familiar with the place as the kids were. He was home, a rare shift off in the madness and Stiles could see him and Melissa sitting on the back porch. It felt comforting to have them in close proximity, especially after what had happened at the Jungle. The whole weekend had been quite in fact, the rest of the pack keeping a low profile and only messaging in fits and starts.

‘Boyd says it’s...’ Derek squinted at his phone. ‘A spiderwort?’

‘Aha!’ Stiles had the journal open in a second. ‘Good for healing and as a general analgesic.’ He glanced at Derek and snickered. ‘It can also help improve your breast milk production.’

‘You have got to stop reading all the mpreg werewolf fic.’ Derek replied and kicked out at him. Stiles dodged, laughing as he set the journal down and moved to stand between Derek’s knees. Derek returned his smile and rested his arms on Stiles’ shoulders, fingers toying with the hair at the nape of Stiles’ neck. His eyes were crystal clear, the green almost translucent in the daylight.

‘I’ll stop when I want.’ Stiles retorted. ‘You’re not the boss of me.’

‘No.’ Noah’s voice came from the door. ‘That would be me.’

They broke apart and Derek slid off the workbench, ears red.

‘Is everything okay?’ Stiles asked because his dad was wearing his concerned face.

‘Tara just rang.’ he said. ‘Laura apparently went home early. Said she wasn’t feeling well.’

Derek’s eyebrows skyrocketed.

‘How?’ he asked, sounding honestly baffled. ‘Laura’s never had a sick day in her life.’

‘I tried to call her.’ Noah was looking at him. ‘She’d got her phone off.’

‘Well, have you called Lydia?’ Derek asked, frowning so hard his eyebrows about joined up. ‘If she’s not with us, she’s with her.’

‘No, actually.’ Noah replied. ‘I don’t have her number.’

‘I’ll call her.’ Stiles dug his phone out of his pocket. It rang for a few minutes and then went to voicemail. ‘Okay, that’s weird. She’s not answering either.’

‘Ew.’ Derek was making a face. ‘There’s implications to that, that I don’t want to think about.’

‘Yeah.’ Noah was now making his own pained face. ‘Guess that’s it. But it’s not like her to just take off work. This is the second time in as many days too.’

‘No, it’s not.’ Derek said and then they all jumped when Stiles’ phone screamed. He’d thought it

was hilarious to set that as Lydia's ringtone but in light of recent events, it perhaps wasn't the best idea. He answered, fumbling the phone before he finally managed to get a good grip on it.

'Lydia?' He froze when he heard the sniffing on the other side. 'Hey, what's wrong?'

'Stuff.' Lydia replied, clearly trying to sound casual. 'What do you want, Stiles?'

'Nothing, we were just looking for Laura.' Stiles gave Derek a confused look and saw it reflected in Derek's expression.

'Well, she's not here.' Lydia now sounded bitter. 'Maybe you should ask your boyfriend why she broke up with me and maybe he can shed some light on the issue.'

'What?' Derek looked shocked, wrestling the phone from Stiles. 'Lydia? What the hell?'

'She did it on Friday.' Lydia said, strident enough that even Stiles could hear her. 'She broke our mate bond.'

'What?' Derek threw Stiles a frantic look. 'No. She wouldn't just do that.' He put a hand to his chest and the vulnerability on his face just about broke Stiles' heart. 'I can still feel you.'

'Because we're pack, not mates.' Lydia said, then her voice dropped low and Derek stood and listened, his face getting more distressed by the second. He hung up after a minute and then looked at Stiles and Noah.

'Something's very wrong.' he said and Stiles felt a chill go down his spine.

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Peter sat on the steps of the back porch and thought. He had several books at his side and a beer, taking sips while he listened with half an ear to Cora and Isaac in the kitchen and paged through them to try and find something to explain what he'd seen the day before. He'd learned to keep track of all the cubs while doing other tasks after the fire, his drive to make sure his pack was safe stronger than it had ever been. He had the same sick feeling now as he'd had when his pack bonds had broken in the fire and for the life of him he couldn't figure out why.

The sound of a car caught his attention and he got up, stretching before going around the side of the house to see who it was. It didn't surprise him when he saw Chris' SUV and he shoved both hands in his pockets and gave him and Allison a half smile when they got out the car.

'Hi.' He sighed. 'I'm guessing this isn't a social visit.'

'No.' Chris looked exhausted, dark shadows under his eyes. Allison wasn't much better and Peter could see the toll having her feral aunt locked up was taking on her. He nodded towards the house.

'Cora and Isaac are baking.' he said to her, gentling his tone. 'Quite frankly, I fear for the kitchen. You couldn't help them out, could you?'

Allison glanced at her father and he nodded. She gave Peter a grateful smile, her dimples not nearly as pronounced as they normally were and went inside. Peter waited until the door was shut and looked back at Chris.

'You look like shit.' he said and Chris' mouth twisted.

'Can we take a walk?' he asked and Peter nodded.

‘Sure.’ He moved to fall into step with Chris, studying his face. ‘She’s taking it hard, isn’t she?’

‘You have to understand.’ Chris said. ‘When Allison was little, she worshipped Kate. Kate was her cool aunt who did exciting things and travelled and sent her the best gifts from all the amazing places she went. I never wanted to deprive Allison of her family, so I never interfered in the relationship. Maybe, I should have. Maybe, I should have put some distance between them. When we found out what Kate had done to Kali and Ennis’ packs, it was soul destroying for her. In a way, her mother’s betrayal of our code was actually easier to understand than Kate’s. Victoria’s family was always a bunch of fanatics.’

Peter sighed and reached out, catching Chris’ hand in his.

‘I never wanted kids.’ he said. ‘I never wanted a mate after you left. But then the fire happened and I ended up being a dad, albeit a very unorthodox one. I understand wanting to protect them.’

‘She’s so grown up now I barely recognise her.’ Chris said. ‘When he got Kate into containment, Allison’s face was just...’ He trailed off and gave Peter a heartbroken look. ‘I’ve never seen her so cold. I don’t want her to lose her humanity over this.’

‘Humanity is relative, Christopher.’ Peter replied. ‘And your daughter is fine. She’s angry and she has every right to be. You need to be there for her to help her work things through.’ He squeezed Chris’ hand. ‘And I’ll be here for you to do the same.’

‘Thank you.’ Chris’ mask slipped and Peter could see the desperate gratitude there.

‘Where is she?’ he asked and Chris heaved a sigh.

‘There’s a warehouse downtown that we’ve got set up.’ he said. ‘Her and Theo are both there. Laura said she would liaise with Deucalion but we haven’t heard anything from her yet.’

‘No?’ Peter frowned. ‘She hasn’t come to see you?’

‘No.’ Chris gave him a questioning look. ‘I assumed she was busy with the last murder.’

‘Yes, but she’s the alpha.’ Peter said. ‘This is her priority.’

‘We have it under control.’ Chris assured him. ‘Trust me, it would take one hell of a breach to get Kate out of there. As for Theo, he’s starting to come out of it. Last night he managed to shift back to human for a couple of minutes.’

‘Maybe he can be salvaged.’ Peter said. ‘Did you and Noshiko reach Corinne?’

‘Yes.’ A ghost of a smirk crossed Chris’ face. ‘You didn’t mention that she was your ex.’

‘I try not to think about it.’ Peter huffed. ‘That relationship was a complete disaster.’

‘She said that if he’s stable, we can transport him once Kate is dealt with.’ Chris turned his face into the sun. ‘They’ll teach him control and if he’s okay, he can come back.’

Peter nodded. He kept walking, thinking about what he and Boyd had seen the day before. He’d told Boyd to keep it quiet until he could talk to Laura about it but now he was wondering what Chris might know. Another opinion couldn’t hurt.

‘Come on.’ He tugged Chris off the path and towards the lake. ‘I have something to show you.’

'This is bad.' Derek was pacing, nails in his mouth. Noah looked at Stiles who shrugged. He had no idea what to do to make Derek calm down, but he had to do something because Derek was pretty much vibrating with distress.

'I didn't know a mate bond could be broken.' he said. 'I thought it was pretty much it once it was established.'

'Please don't remind me.' Noah arched an eyebrow at him. 'But yes, I was under the same expression. In fact, it was Laura that told me that very thing after you two...' He waved a vague hand at them in lieu of actually voicing his thoughts.

'It shouldn't be possible.' Derek shook his head. 'It would have to be...'

'Magic?' Stiles asked and their eyes met, the realisation hitting them like a brick to the face. 'Dad, didn't you say that Laura saw the Darach outside the club?'

'Yeah. that's what she told me.' Noah replied. 'Her and Tara.'

'How hard would it be to hex an alpha wolf?' Stiles looked at Derek who shrugged.

'I have no idea.' he replied. 'That's Peter's area.'

Stiles gave Noah a pleading look and watched his father's face fall.

'Aw crap.' He turned and started for the house. 'Be back before sundown or so help me, I'll ground you until you're forty.'

'Come on.' Derek was already tugging him out the door. 'We'll take the shortcut.'

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'Holy shit.' Chris was staring at the Nemeton, his face an absolute picture. 'Should it be doing that?'

'No.' Peter could see that the saplings seemed to have grown another foot overnight. 'And when you snap a branch, it bleeds.'

'Black magic?' Chris asked and he huffed and kicked at a root.

'Yes and no.' He waved a hand at the shoots. 'This regrowth probably would have happened eventually after Stiles coming back and assuming his role as the territory's spark. This is very speeded up though. This is feeding off the magic the Darach is using and siphoning it back out of her, but that wouldn't be enough in and of itself. But it's also siphoning off Stiles is my guess. The fact that he's now pack and the fact that he's clearly not evil means it's kind of balancing things out a bit. The blood is from the sacrifices, but she'll need more to break Stiles' hold on things.'

'How many more?' Chris asked and Peter pursed his lips.

'Twelve more according to what I've read.' he replied. 'She's taken virgins. That provides her with a glamour. It hides her true nature, cloaks her in innocence and beauty as well as boosting her power through the Nemeton. We can't find her because of that. After that come the Warriors. They'll give her invulnerability and strength. Then come healers, philosophers and finally guardians.'

'And then?' Chris' eyes were wide. 'Does it go supernova and take her with it?'

'I honestly have no idea.' Peter replied. 'For her to take over, she'll need more than just the sacrifices. I mean, that's just my hypothesis. The fact that Stiles is attached to the Nemeton now means she can't just take it. She'll need one more really big boost to break the connection between the pack and the tree and control it.'

'I really don't like the sound of that.' Chris muttered and then gave Peter a questioning look. A moment later, a howl floated up through the air and Peter's eyes flashed gold.

'That's Derek.' he said. 'And he sounds like he's in trouble.'

-

Laura woke up feeling lethargic and more than a little out of it. She'd rarely had the chance to get drunk when she was younger and this felt thicker than that, her whole brain foggy and her body aching.

She had to fight to sit up, rubbing her eyes and trying to focus on the blurry figure standing by the side of the bed.

'There you are.' The woman's voice was soft and hypnotic. 'I really had no idea what a powerhouse you are. At this rate, I'll be able to take all the sacrifices without any of your pack being able to even touch me. And when that's done, I'll have you to bleed for the tree and break that away from that little Spark that's attached himself to it. Between the two of you, I'll have all the power I need to get what I want once I've killed you both.'

The words should have been alarming and the part of Laura's brain that was still working screamed at her that she was in danger and so was her pack. She tried to get up, but the woman placed a fingertip against her forehead and she fell back onto the sheets.

'Uh-uh, now we'll have none of that.' The woman sat down next to her. 'You're not going anywhere just yet. I still have some work to do and you're going to lie there and let me take what I want.' She leaned in and Laura wrinkled her nose at the overly sweet smell of the woman's skin as she moved closer and kissed her.

When they parted it was like all Laura's fears had evaporated and she basked in her beloved's attention and let her move over her without a fight.

-

'Shit.' Lydia hissed. She had a hand over her heart and Jackson let out a worried whine and took her wrist. His veins turned black as he took the pain, the sharpness of it not entirely physical. It had been his suggestion that Lydia try to reach Laura through the bond between them and for a moment Lydia had felt like they were connected again.

'We need to talk to Peter.' He glanced at Danny, who nodded.

'I agree.' he said. 'I don't care what you two left things on, this is not normal.'

'Laura wouldn't just sever the bond.' Jackson looked murderous. 'There's something going on and I'd bet my tail it's magical and connected to the Darach.' He let go of her hand and stood up.

'Come on. Put your face on. I'm taking you to Peter.'

'Maybe we should call Stiles as well.' Danny said. 'Seeing as he's now also in on the act.'

'Good idea.' Jackson hauled Lydia up and steered her towards her closet. 'Send him a message.'

Derek said they'd be at his house today so they can meet us there. I also need you to do some research for me, find out what happens to mate bonds that break.'

'I can do that.' Danny said. He watched as Lydia listlessly flicked through her clothes. 'And it's just a thought but if the Darach is someone that recently moved to town, maybe I could start also checking out new arrivals as well. Couldn't hurt to narrow things down.'

'Good idea.' Jackson gave him a grim look over Lydia's head. 'We really need to get the upper hand here.'

-

'What the hell is wrong?' Peter had run all the way back to the house. He had found Derek and Stiles on the back porch with a worried looking Cora, Allison and Isaac and was now standing on the steps with Chris behind him, panting rather loudly after trying to keep up.

'Tell him.' Cora said, elbowing her brother in the side.

'Noah said that Laura left work.' Derek's fangs were out, which made him lisp. He was clearly very agitated to lose control like that. 'She just took off and nobody can find her. Her phone's off.'

'She also broke her mate bond with Laura.' Cora's lower lip wobbled and Peter was astonished to smell how close to tears she was. Then again, they loved Lydia like another sister so this news was pretty awful.

'What?' He wasn't sure he'd heard correctly at first. 'That can't happen. Mate bonds are normally too strong to break, unless something pretty drastic happens.'

'Lydia wouldn't lie about something like that.' Derek growled. 'And Stiles said that it's probably magic.'

'And of course, we all thought of the Darach.' Stiles added, gnawing on a nail. 'She would be powerful enough to pull something like that off, wouldn't she?'

Peter felt his blood run cold.

'Inside.' He herded them all in, taking out his phone and rather fruitlessly dialling Laura's number. When it went straight to voicemail, he tried Lydia and then lowered his hand, his ears picking up the sound of Jackson's Porsche.

His son came in moments later with a pale faced Lydia in tow. Danny was with them and the second they came into the living room, Lydia's face crumpled and she burst into tears when she saw them all assembled. .

'You have to do something.' Jackson growled, bundling her into his arms. 'This is all kinds of fucked up.'

'Shit.' The scent of worry was thickening and Peter knew he had to take control before the rest of his pack started to freak out. 'Okay. Jackson take Lydia up to Laura's room. Danny, you stay here. I need you to help me.'

'Already on it.' Danny replied, setting up his laptop on the coffee table and sitting on the floor. 'I told Jacks we need to try and find this person so I've started checking out who's recently moved to town.'

‘Good. I’ll also need you to hack into any CCTV around the station that we can find, maybe track Laura that way.’ Peter looked at Stiles. ‘You need to come with me. Cora, call Erica and Boyd and tell them Isaac’s coming to get them so they can go to the station, see if they can get a scent or anything at all. Then I need you to get on the phone to Satomi and Noshiko, tell them we’ve got a missing alpha.’

‘I can go with Isaac.’ Allison said, already down the stairs. Peter saw the look that passed between her and Chris and thought briefly about their earlier conversation.

‘What about me?’ Derek asked.

‘You’re with me and Stiles.’ Peter replied. ‘I need to show you both something.’

-

Noah paced the kitchen. Stiles had messaged him to tell him that they were all starting to look for Laura and he was frustrated by standing around doing nothing.

He dialled Tara’s phone and she answered within three rings.

‘Sorry, Boss.’ She sounded harried. ‘We just had a call from a woman downtown. She was with her boyfriend at a gas station and when she came out from paying, he was gone. Just the car standing running but no sign of him.’

‘Jesus Christ.’ Noah shook his head as Melissa came into the kitchen, drawn by his exclamation. ‘Did anyone see anything?’

‘No.’ Tara sounded like she was walking. ‘That’s not the weirdest part. There’s a camera on the forecourt and the owner immediately went and checked the footage. It gets stuck just as the woman gets out the car and goes inside. Then there’s some kind of weird fuzzy stuff and the next shot is just the empty car.’

‘Well that doesn’t sound suspicious at all.’ Noah muttered, already headed for the hallway. He passed the living room and saw Kira and Scott looking at him, concern on their faces.

‘She’s pretty distraught. Apparently he just got back from a tour of active duty in the Middle East and she says there’s no way he would have just gone anywhere or allow himself to be taken without a fight. He left his wallet and his phone behind too.’

‘Name?’ Noah shrugged into his jacket and grabbed his car keys.

‘Kyle Lancet.’ Tara replied. ‘I’m headed over to the gas station right now. It’s the one on Maple.’

‘I’ll meet you there.’ Noah replied and hung up. Melissa was next to him, her arms around herself.

‘Be careful.’ she said and he nodded, kissing her quickly and opening the door.

‘Keep them here.’ he replied. ‘Stiles always says the house is safest.’

Melissa nodded and he heard her lock the door behind him. By the time he got to the cruiser, his phone was ringing again.

‘Clarke?’ He got in and started the engine. ‘What’s wrong?’

‘We’ve got another one.’ Clarke said. She was one of the younger deputies and as sharp as a tack. ‘Tara told me if anything squirrelly came into call you. Jonathan Mathis just came in to report his

sister missing. She teaches music at the high school and you know how much crazy stuff has been going down there so I figured it fit.'

'Mother...' Noah cut himself off. 'What happened?'

'She went out running this morning. That was four hours ago.' Clarke said. 'He said he wouldn't normally worry about her because she was in the Marines and now teaches self defense at the community college. But after all the shit that's happened recently, he's really freaking out.'

'A Marine?' Noah was starting to see a pattern and he didn't like it at all. He sped down the road, hoping like hell he was wrong. 'Okay, I'm going over to the gas station first. Make sure you keep him there. I want to talk to him.'

-

'Oh boy.' Stiles' eyes were wide. Derek whined and pressed closer to him. All his instincts were going nuts, a little voice repeating protect him over and over in his head.

'Exactly.' Peter said from the other side of the stump, arms folded. Chris was next to him, regarding the stump with suspicion. 'Thoughts?'

'I have no freaking idea.' Stiles flailed. 'I just started learning.'

'Nothing in your journal?' Peter pressed. 'I'm flying blind here and I really need you to think. How does it feel to you?'

'Warm.' Stiles replied, shrugging. 'Like it normally does. Maybe a bit more than normal.'

'This is way more than a bit.' Peter mused, walking back around to them. 'I think she's tapping into the Nemeton but it's resisting. She needs the sacrifices to make sure she assumes full control. It's still connected to you and I think that's what's stopping her from getting in.'

'She'd need another power source then.' Derek said. He had calmed down a bit, but at the thought of the Darach doing anything to Stiles, his claws came out. 'Is that anything to do with Laura?'

'An alpha spark is very strong.' Peter looked thoughtful. 'There was an encounter with the Darach outside the nightclub. She had two of the three virgins, so it's possible she could glamour Laura.'

'And Lydia?' Stiles asked. 'Is she doing that too?'

'Probably.' Peter replied. 'Lydia's bond with Laura would definitely present an obstacle to the Drach's control.' His face did something complicated and Derek was immediately on alert.

'What?' He glared at his uncle. 'You've just thought about something you don't want to tell us.'

'He did?' Stiles was now also looking at Peter. 'How can you tell?'

'I know him.' Derek growled. 'Peter. What is it?'

'It's delicate.' Peter made a face. 'Sex magic. It's a very powerful tool, and having sex with the alpha whose territory the Nemeton belongs in would not only give the Darach more control over it but it would also allow her to drain Laura's spark.'

'But it certainly wouldn't be consensual.' Chris looked horrified.

'Not at all.' Peter's eyes were glowing in anger. 'But it makes sense. For her to get to Laura, the

Darach would need Lydia out the way. She's glamourised her into breaking the bond.'

'Oh man.' Stiles was making a face. 'Lydia is going to be severely pissed.'

Derek was still watching Peter when he saw the epiphany happen.

'Stiles.' Peter started smiling but it wasn't at all pleasant. 'You're a genius.'

'I am?' Stiles gave Derek a bemused look. 'I mean, obviously I am but why is that?'

'Lydia is the key.' Peter was already striding off and they had to jog to catch up. 'I know how to get Laura back.'

Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Thank you to everyone for all your lovely comments!!! I really appreciate the support and you are all so welcome here :)))) I will get around to answering eventually but I just wanted to say that.

‘Lydia.’ Jackson was holding out both hands in a conciliatory gesture. ‘Please calm down.’

‘Crap.’ Peter peered out from behind the couch where he was sheltering with Cora. ‘I didn’t think this through enough.’

‘No shit.’ Derek hissed at him from under the dining table. Next to him Stiles was huddled with wide eyes. Danny and Chris were across from them, flattened against the wall as the room’s contents whizzed by, barely missing them.

In the centre of it all, Lydia floated a foot off the ground. The effect was a little ruined by the fact that she was in sweats and a baggy lacrosse jersey of Jackson’s but her milky white eyes and the way her hair floated around her face as she screamed definitely made up for it. Jackson had managed to get her to come down when they had returned from the Nemeton and Peter had told her what his working theory was as to why Laura had broken their bond and she’d taken it very badly. The screaming was thankfully being done in rage as opposed to predicting the death of anyone, but Stiles wouldn’t have bet on the Darach managing to last a day once Lydia got her hands on her.

He’d read about banshees but seeing Lydia in action was spectacular. The night at the club had been chaotic and dark and he’d been distracted by using his own magic, but now he could feel the raw power coming off of her.

‘I’m going to kill her.’ Lydia’s voice vibrated in a way that made Stiles stick his fingers in his ears. It went right through him and he couldn’t understand how the wolves were able to stand it.

‘We need to get Laura back first.’ Peter told her. ‘We need you to go in and fight the Darach’s spell.’

Lydia turned her head in his direction, slowly like something out of a horror movie and Stiles shivered at the sight of her flat white eyes.

‘She’s my wolf.’ Her voice edged towards unearthly. ‘My mate.’

‘Yeah.’ Jackson was bowed under the weight of the power around her and Stiles was impressed that he was able to be as close as he was. He clearly wasn’t Lydia’s best friend for nothing. ‘But to do that, you need to get a grip. Destroying the house won’t solve anything.’

Lydia tilted her head and then it was like all the air was suddenly sucked out of the room. All the things that had been floating around them dropped to the floor and Peter winced at the sound of something breaking. Lydia descended gracefully, her Uggs setting down and her eyes and hair changing back as her anger receded. Now she looked determined and Stiles eased a little closer to

Derek.

‘She’s mad.’ he said and Derek nodded, crawling out from under the table.

‘What do I need to do?’ Lydia asked and Peter got up, dusting himself off.

‘We need you to break through the Darach’s glamour long enough to reestablish the bond.’ he said. ‘Meanwhile, our young spark is going to do a searching spell and use the Nemeton to amplify the pack bond and mate bond enough that we can get a read on her location. Then you can go in and blow the bitch away.’

‘Good.’ Lydia’s eyes flickered briefly. ‘She’s going to be in for a world of hurt when I get hold of her.’

‘Er...Peter?’ Stiles looked around at them. ‘I have no idea how to do that, you know that right?’

‘It’s like dowsing.’ Peter turned to Cora and Danny. ‘Danny, head upstairs to my study. There are some maps of Beacon Hills and the preserve in the cabinet. Cora, can you go to Laura’s dresser and find her pendant.’

‘On it.’ Cora was already bounding up the stairs, followed by Danny.

‘Is this safe?’ Derek asked as Peter cleared debris from the tabletop.

‘I don’t know.’ Peter glanced at Lydia. ‘But I think you can handle it.’

‘I can.’ Lydia’s face was set. ‘Where do you want me?’

‘Here.’ Peter pulled out a chair for her. ‘Stiles, go stand opposite.’

Stiles moved, Derek coming to flank him. Jackson moved to stand behind Lydia and Stiles looked at Peter questioningly.

‘Anchors.’ Peter smiled. ‘Derek is yours and in Laura’s absence, Jackson will have to do for Lydia.’

‘He’s enough.’ Lydia gave Jackson a small smile. ‘He’s strong.’

Jackson returned it and placed both hands on her shoulders. A moment later, Danny and Cora came back with the required items. Peter spread the map out on the table, Chris watching over his shoulder with interest.

‘I’ve heard of this.’ he said. ‘But I’ve never seen it performed.’

‘Here.’ Peter held out a slender silver chain with a beautifully rendered triple moon hanging from it, set with glimmering cabochons that Stiles knew were moonstones. ‘Hold it over the map with one hand and give Derek your other. I don’t know what’s going to happen, just remember that for you it’s about belief. Believe you can find Laura and you will.’

‘Okay.’ Stiles took a deep breath. Derek took his free hand and squeezed gently.

‘You can do it.’ he murmured and Stiles nodded, then looked at Lydia. Their eyes met and he felt something inside him click into place.

‘Holy crap.’ Cora breathed. ‘Look at his tattoos.’

'They did that before.' He looked down at his arms, seeing the way the lines lit up with their respective colours, the brilliance of them almost blinding.

'So fucking cool.' Derek whispered, grinning at him. Stiles remembered the morning in Derek's bed and had to focus when Lydia started to hum. It was disconcerting, off key and eerie with how she tilted her head again and seemed to be listening to something only she could hear. There was a sharp tug inside him and next to him Derek gasped, as did all the others.

'She's just tapping into the pack bonds.' Peter reassured them. 'It's going to get worse before it gets better so brace yourselves.' He was rubbing at his chest and Chris moved to rest a tentative hand on his shoulder. That had Cora and Derek exchanging looks.

'Just a little more.' Lydia murmured and then her eyes went white. 'I think I've got her.'

-

Laura felt her body moving of its own accord, but the actions were not lining up with what was in her head. Something was working its way into the back of her mind but the woman on the other side of the room was too distracted to notice. She grabbed at it and felt it entwine her mind in a way that was very familiar and it gave her enough clarity to realise that she was restrained, her wrists tied to the bedstead with rope that burned and blistered her skin.

The woman turned and smiled but for the first time since she'd met her, Laura was repelled.

'Yes, sorry about that.' she said, her beautiful face shifting so quickly to something terrifying that for a second Laura didn't realise what she was seeing. 'I couldn't take the chance of you walking off after they tried to break through the last time. I need you right where I have you.'

Laura managed a tiny growl, so weak it sounded like she was a cub again. The more she held onto the feeling in her head the clearer her mind was getting. It felt right, cool like a fall evening in the woods. It soothed her and bolstered her strength and she felt anger and guilt when she realised what it was. This time she was the one to dig in and felt her claws come out.

'What's going on in there?' The woman brushed soft brown curls out of her eyes and leaned down to rest her fingers against Laura's forehead. 'Oh not this again. One moment, I'll have them gone soon.'

Her face shifted completely this time and Laura found herself looking up into the horror she'd seen in front of the Jungle and the shock of it had her shifting in kind, roaring in the Darach's face.

-

'Oh no you don't.' Lydia muttered. She was breathing hard with effort, her hair now matted to her sweaty face. Stiles was shaking with it too, the power being drawn right out of him by her fight against what felt like a morass, thick and corrupted. He gritted his teeth and reached out in turn, feeling the stream of energy that was the Nemeton and mentally dunking himself in it.

'Jesus.' Derek was staring at him. 'Peter...?'

'He's fine.' Peter leaned forward on the table and pointed at the map. 'Lydia's got her, Stiles. Now you need to find where she is.'

Stiles held the pendant up, hand trembling as he moved it over the map. It was starting to sway violently back and forth and he had to tighten his grip so it wouldn't fly out of his hand.

‘That’s it.’ Peter urged. ‘Lydia, you need to break through.’

‘I’m trying.’ Lydia hissed and the next surge of power had Stiles gasping as she yanked it out of him. He felt something snap in his head and the pendant dragged him right across the table, as surely as if someone had yanked him and then slammed into the map and the wood underneath, stuck in a part of downtown that he didn’t know.

‘Got her!’ Peter gestured frantically at Chris. ‘Go! Call Allison and the rest of the pack.’

Chris didn’t answer, already running out the door.

-

Laura bowed up, her strength coming back in waves. The rope was holding fast, more than likely enchanted as well as steeped in wolfsbane and the pain was enough to make her snarl and twist in a bid to escape.

The Darach was back in her human form and now Laura had a vague recollection of seeing her around - at the market, the school and other places. She knew that whatever had happened, the Darach had clearly been controlling her through magic and when she reached for her pack and Lydia, she found the bonds weak and strained.

‘No.’ the Darach said, low and angry. ‘You can’t have her.’ She threw out both hands towards Laura and the thick heaviness from before tried to push its way back in. It was countered by nothing but white light and an icy calm that Laura could recognise a mile away.

‘You’re fucked.’ she snarled through her fangs. ‘You’re just making her angrier.’

‘She’s a banshee.’ The Darach sneered. ‘This little trick of hers won’t last long.’

The pain that came was indescribable and Laura howled, long and bereft. She needed her mate and her pack if she was going to make it out and away.

-

‘She’s fighting.’ Lydia slammed her hands on the table.

‘Fight back.’ Peter urged. ‘Stiles, you need to give her everything you’ve got.’

Stiles was exhausted. He felt like he’d just run ten miles, every muscle aching.

‘It’s okay.’ Derek moved to stand behind him, his arms coming around to pull Stiles against his chest. ‘I’ve got you.’

Stiles closed his eyes and let his mind fall open. He thought of the tree and the way lines of pure energy lit up the land, leading from it right to him.

Please. Help me.

It took what felt like forever before the answer chimed in his mind like a great brass bell.

So be it, Little Spark.

He convulsed, sending everything inside him streaming out to Lydia and barely feeling the way the tattoos crawled along his skin, lighting it up from the inside. His own pendant lay like a weight on his chest as the one in his hand burned like a hot pan.

-

Laura knew the second the Darach's hold broke, the kick from her own mind sending her flying across the room. She stood, bleeding profusely from her nose.

And stay out! Lydia's voice sounded in her mind, loud enough that the Darach winced.

'This isn't over.' she shrieked and Laura growled as she flew up and into the shadows of what was now revealed to be a warehouse. Gone was the cosy boudoir, yet another glamour.

Laura collapsed back on the bed, wheezing in pain and fury as she waited for the sirens that had just come into hearing to get to her. She heard the sound of a door being blown inwards, the distinctive smell of magic as Tara came running towards her with her weapon drawn.

'Chris called Noah and he called me.' she said. 'He's right behind me. Lucky for you, we were just down a couple of blocks.'

'Get it off me.' Laura growled, tugging at the ropes. 'It burns like a motherfucker!'

Tara waved both hands, gun safely stowed, and the ropes burst into purple flames, flaring as they were incinerated.

'Come on.' She helped Laura to sit up and grabbed something off the ground that turned out to be a blue silk robe. 'I'm sure Noah doesn't want to see you in your underwear. Could make department meetings awkward.'

Laura let out a weak laugh and shrugged into it, her skin crawling when she caught the Darach's scent on it.

'I think I've done something unforgivable.' she said, her heart sinking when she realised what her lack of clothing meant.

'No.' Tara said firmly. 'You've been magically assaulted. It's nothing you had any control over and when we find that bitch, I'm going to skin her alive for it.'

'You won't be the only one.' Laura examined her wrists, her healing slowly kicking in. 'Lydia?'

'At the house.' Tara was looking around. The furniture from what had looked like a bedroom was arranged in the middle of the empty warehouse floor. 'You can see her when we get you back.'

Laura folded her arms around herself, her ears pricking up when she heard Noah's cruiser and the sound of the junior wolves' truck. They all came running in and she held out her arms, the three of them flinging themselves into her arms to scent her frantically.

'I'm okay.' she said, almost drowning under Isaac and Boyd's combined weight.

'We're going to murder her.' Erica snarled, eyes gold and her face in Laura's armpit.

'Get in line.' Laura replied, seeing Allison and Noah watching them over Isaac's shoulder. 'Sorry for being such a liability.'

'Magic.' Tara went to them and gently eased the wolves back. 'Come on, give her some space.'

'We need to shut this place down.' Allison said to Noah. 'My dad is on his way.'

'Laura.' Noah took her elbow and steered her towards the door. 'We can make this an official complaint if you want. It looks like assault to me.' His face creased up with worry and it made her

feel a warm rush of affection for him.

'This needs something other than human law.' she replied.

'I agree.' Allison said. 'And now you'll have the Hunters on side as well. I know the law well enough. Magical intervention against the wishes of another is punishable by death.'

'First we need to clean this up.' Tara was looking around her, distaste all over her face. 'She's contaminated everything for a block.'

'I need to go home.' Laura said to Noah. 'My pack can take me. I'll come into the station a little later.'

'Don't rush.' Noah replied, handing her off to Boyd. 'Although I should warn you that we've got a couple of missing persons cases. I was damned worried you'd be the third and I'd have to explain to them.'

Laura frowned at Tara, who shook her head.

'Later.' she said. 'Go.'

-

Chris was speeding and not feeling an ounce of guilt for it. He drifted the SUV around a corner and then had to hit the breaks when he saw a woman standing in the middle of the road, her hand held up and then the car slammed into what felt like an invisible brick wall. When he came to, he found himself slumped in the seat and bleeding. His chest felt like it was on fire and every breath was painful.

He scrabbled for his phone and dialled.

'Dad?' Allison sounded brusque, a clue to her worried state of mind.

'I just had an accident.' he said. 'Seems the Darach likes to cause pile ups.' He peered through the windshield, seeing a blue sedan in the street in front of him, its driver's door open to reveal it was empty. 'And I think she just took someone, right in front of me.'

-

'They've got her.' Jackson said, hanging up on whoever it was who had called him. Derek had been too distracted to listen, focused completely on Stiles. He was on the couch with Lydia, both of them pale and exhausted. He shifted his position on the arm and switched hands, drawing in the fatigue so his veins ran black. On the other side, Cora was doing the same for Lydia.

'Oh thank fuck.' Peter blew out a relieved breath. 'I'm glad it worked.' He gave Stiles a brilliant smile. 'You are one hell of a power source, my boy.'

'Seems so.' Stiles grinned, but it was hazy around the edges. He looked up at Derek, pupils blown. 'And you are better than heroin, or at least what I think heroin must be like.'

Derek snorted at him, not quite ready to speak. He was feeling completely and utterly drained by the whole experience and also so relieved that his sister was found.

'It's great stuff.' Lydia had a serene look on her face. 'How long?'

'They're on their way.' Jackson said. He went to sit in the armchair behind where Danny had

resumed his place in front of the coffee table.

'I got a hit on that search,' he said. 'There's been seven people who've moved to Beacon Hills in the past two months. When you eliminate based on age and demographic, we're down to three.'

'Great.' Peter moved to look at the screen. 'And?'

'And one of them is closer to home than we thought.' Danny turned the laptop slightly so he could see. 'It's Miss Blake.'

'Our English teacher?' Jackson was leaning forward, elbow resting on Danny's shoulders.

'Yeah.' Danny replied and Stiles gasped and looked up at Derek.

'I told you she wasn't right.' He tried to punch the air but it was too much and he fell back into the couch. 'Damn. I'm still kind of dizzy.'

'You need to lie down.' Derek declared and the next thing Stiles knew, he was being scooped up off the couch and carried towards the stairs. He let his head flop back, cackling at his upside down view.

'Oh man.' He beamed up at Derek. 'You are ridiculously strong and you are so doing this on our wedding night.'

Derek chuffed and rolled his eyes at him.

'You're so high, right now,' he said, jogging up the stairs without so much as breaking a sweat. He shouldered his door open and laid Stiles down on his bed. Stiles whined and grabbed his shirt.

'Stay,' he entreated. 'Just for a bit.'

'Okay.' Derek lay down next to him and Stiles snuggled in.

They lay there for a long time, just listening to each other breathing until Derek lifted his head, his face intent.

'You look like the dogs in Up,' Stiles snickered. 'You hear a squirrel?'

'Laura's back.' Derek replied and was off the bed like a shot. Stiles listened to him thundering down the stairs and hummed, closing his eyes for just a moment.

-

'Okay.' Laura sighed and resigned herself to being squeezed to death. Cora and Derek were on either side of her, Derek trying to actually squeeze himself under her arm in spite of the fact that he was a good head and shoulders taller. Jackson was at her back and Isaac had decided to get in on the act one more time, never one to turn down a group hug.

Boyd was to one side, talking quietly to Peter. Laura didn't need to listen to know what he was saying. She'd seen Erica go into the living room and that was what had a sick feeling curdling in her stomach. She could smell the Darach on her skin, now being erased by the scents of her pack, but it was a reminder of what had happened to her. She was suddenly and irretrievably furious and she started to growl deep in her chest. The others backed off and that was when Lydia appeared in the doorway. Her face was pale and drawn and she looked at Laura with tears in her eyes.

Laura whined and cringed away from her, the bond between them filled with guilt and shame.

Lydia opened her mouth to speak but Laura couldn't stay to hear her acceptance, not when she could not accept what she had done. Instead, she let go, her body shifting until her paws hit the ground and she ran upstairs, ignoring the calls from her pack until she could nose her way into her room and under her bed to hide.

-

'She can't even look at me.' Lydia's lip wobbled and Derek felt like he was going to be sick. He'd recognised that look on Laura's face, the guilt there a mirror of the guilt he still felt every time he thought about his pack.

'I'll go talk to her.' he said, cutting Peter off. He met his uncle's eyes, willing him to understand and Peter nodded.

'Go.' He gently herded the rest of the pack back into the living room, putting an arm around Lydia and taking her back to the couch.

Derek took a deep breath and started climbing. Each step felt like a mountain and when he got to the door of Laura's room, the scent of her distress was acidic in his nose. He saw a gleam of red eyes under the bed and dropped to the ground, crawling over to the bed and peering underneath it. Laura was curled up at the very back. She flattened her ears against her head and growled to warn him off.

Derek sighed and sat up, shucking his shirt and getting started on his jeans. Once he was naked, he shifted as well and eased himself under the bed to lie next to her. He was bigger and it was a tight fit but he managed to get into a position where he could rest his head against hers. He whined softly and licked her muzzle and Laura closed her eyes. Her body was a single line of tension and he could hear her heartbeat racing. She smelled bad, like corrupted magic and the body odour of someone who wasn't pack and he growled and started to scent her as ferociously as he could in their confined space.

'Jesus.' Cora's sneakers came into their line of sight. 'Are you both seriously under the bed?'

'It's a comfort thing.' Peter's boots appeared next to her. He crouched down and looked under the bed. 'Laura. She doesn't blame you. She knows you had no control over what happened.'

Laura bared her teeth at him and he made a face.

'I don't care what you think.' he said. 'We all have things we need to atone for, but I'll say the same thing I said to Derek. This was not your fault.'

Derek wriggled closer to Laura and nosed at her fur. She smelled a bit better now but she was starting to shake.

'We need to kill her.' Cora's voice was hard. 'We need to rip her goddamn face off.'

Laura shuddered and Derek wondered what she was thinking about.

'What do you want me to do?' Peter asked, looking at her. Laura whined and slunk further back.

'Fine. But I'm not telling her to leave.' He got up. 'She wouldn't, even if that was really what you wanted.'

He left, taking Cora with him and Laura sighed heavily and rested her head on her paws. Derek leaned his against her, even though it meant a crick in the neck, and closed his eyes. If this was

what she needed, he would stay a wolf all night to give it to her.

It was about half an hour later when he heard another tentative step on the landing outside the room and then Stiles came in.

‘Hello?’ He hovered in the doorway, socked feet shifting uneasily. ‘Peter said you two were in here so I thought I’d see if I could help.

Derek looked at Laura and she huffed and rolled onto her side, facing away from him. He wriggled out slowly, hearing Stiles gasp when he saw him.

‘Dude.’ His voice was filled with awe. ‘That’s insane.’ Derek whuffed, standing up and shaking out his fur. He sidled over and leaned heavily against Stiles’ legs and felt those long fingers thread through his ruff.

His touch was soothing and Derek could hear Laura lift her head. He nosed at Stiles’ hand and looked back at the bed.

‘I get it, dude.’ Stiles said and then he was gone. Derek retreated under the bed and a few moments later, Stiles was back with Lydia.

‘Laura?’ Her voice was filled with tears. Laura whined loudly and hid her face in her paws and Derek knew exactly how she felt. He nudged her with his nose and then crawled out, hoping she’d follow his example. He went to tug at Stiles’ shirt with his teeth and Stiles sank to the ground, legs sprawled to make room for him. Derek draped himself over him, head in Stiles’ lap. Lydia watched them, her eyes misty with tears, and then copied Stiles.

‘I’m here.’ she said. ‘And I know you feel like shit right now, but I’m just so glad to have you back. You need to know that I would never turn you away. The Darach glamourised you. I get that better than you think. I just want you to talk to me.’

Laura’s whines grew more strident and Derek sank into Stiles’ arms and tried to project the feelings of comfort he was getting from him through to her. He made soft little chuffs and thumped his tail on the hardwood floor.

Lydia’s eyes were fixed on the bed. She laid one hand on the ground and Derek felt a zing go through the pack bonds. Lydia didn’t use them often but he felt something pulling him in and heard the sound of people below him. A furry dark brown shape came bounding past him and onto the bed, followed by another one that was iron grey. Lydia got up and went to kneel at the end of the bed, bowed over to look underneath. On top, Cora and Peter were already arranging themselves. The other betas trickled in, all barefoot and shucking their outer layers. Skin to skin contact was important and they all went to curl up with the two wolves. Stiles was goggling above him and Derek snorted, feeling his astonishment. He hadn’t seen them in full shift before. The bitten wolves couldn’t shift completely, but they were in half shift and settling down. Jackson wasn’t there, but then he was wired differently and Derek could hear him moving around downstairs. He would keep watch while they lay together and Danny would stay with him.

Lydia held out a hand, leaning in under the bed.

‘Come on.’ she said, smiling through her tears. ‘You don’t deserve to hate yourself.’

Derek looked up at Stiles, his heart full. Stiles looked back at him, smoothing the fur on Derek’s face and tugging on one silky ear. He didn’t need to say anything. Derek got up and caught his wrist between his teeth. He flicked his eyes to the bed and smelled the trepidation in Stiles’ scent.’

‘Me?’ he asked and Erica growled.

‘You’re pack dumbass.’ She was cuddled between Isaac and Boyd with Cora draped over her. ‘Get up here.’

‘Stiles got up and followed Derek to the bed. He hopped up, waiting until Stiles got on to herd him into place between him and Peter. Stiles settled in and Derek stretched out along his front. Peter curled around Stiles’ feet and they waited while Lydia sat and watched. She had started humming tunelessly and Derek knew she was listening to the unheard voices that only she could hear. It was oddly relaxing and he closed his eyes, sinking into the warmth and comfort of being surrounded by his pack.

Eventually there was a quiet shuffling and they all held their breath. The mattress sank when Laura got up and Lydia followed her. She eased her way in between them and ended up right in the middle. Derek rested his head on Lydia’s hip and looked at his sister and alpha where she was lying in Lydia’s arms. The other betas had all turned over so Isaac was spooning her and being spooned by Erica and Boyd in turn, while Cora slunk up the middle and curled around Laura’s back paws, her head on Laura’s rump. Peter huffed and did the same thing, his head on Stiles and his light eyes trained on his niece. It was a mess of arms and legs and paws and Derek had never felt so safe or contained in his life.

There was nothing but the sound of breathing for a long time and he felt Laura start to relax, her heartbeat evening out.

‘It’s okay, baby.’ Lydia murmured, stroking her ears. ‘I’ve got you.’

Laura whined and closed her eyes and they all lay still and silent and let her.

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Derek's eyes opened when his phone began to play the incredibly annoying submarine alarm siren that Cora set as his alarm. He usually switched it back but she'd managed to get the drop on him. He swatted at his nightstand, managing to shut the damn thing off and then stretched. He could hear Cora and Isaac cackling down below him and he growled.

'I will kill you.' he muttered, sitting up and the cackling got louder. Normally Derek would be pissed but after the drama of the weekend, he was just glad to hear his sister and erstwhile brother-in-law laughing.

He took a long shower, still bleary eyed when he came out and traded places with a shirtless Isaac. Cora was in her underwear when he passed her open doorway, pursing her lips at a purple t-shirt. Laura's door was shut and he stopped to listen briefly, hearing the steady thump of her and Lydia's hearts.

'She's taking a day.' Peter said, coming out of his room. He was dressed for the store and he stopped to give Derek a quick scenting. 'Make sure you're not late this afternoon and bring Stiles with you. I think we need to do some work on defensive magic for him.'

'Okay.' Derek replied, jogging back up the stairs. He texted Stiles while he was getting dressed and got a reply back offering him, Cora and Isaac a ride. He sent back an affirmative and headed downstairs. Peter was in the kitchen, head in the fridge.

'Breakfast?' He looked up at Derek.

'Sure.' Derek moved around him to get the toast started while Peter scrambled eggs and cooked bacon. They all needed to eat hugely in the morning.

Cora and Isaac came down just as he was dishing up, taking their plates with murmured thanks and diving in.

'What about them?' Derek looked up at the ceiling and Peter shook his head.

'Lydia's taking a day off school.' he replied. 'She's so far ahead it won't make any difference and she's understandably still worried about Laura.'

Derek understood. He knew what Laura was going through all too well and he'd had a long talk with her the day before. She and Lydia were strong though and he knew they'd make it through, in spite of the shit the Darach had pulled.

The sound of Stiles' jeep about twenty minutes later was unmistakeable and they all went out to meet him. There was a brief struggle to all fit in and Derek ended up with Cora's elbow in his ribs but it was still better than the bus.

'Hey.' Stiles' eyes met his in the mirror. 'How are things?'

'Lydia's staying home today.' he replied, leaning forward to nuzzle at the back of Stiles' head.

'Understandable.' Stiles made a face. 'It sucks.'

‘Erica and Boyd on their way.’ Isaac had his phone out. ‘Erica said they needed to take their mind off things so school’s as good a place as any.’

Derek nodded. He knew how badly they had all been thrown by what had happened.

‘Seems kind of crazy after what happened.’ Stiles huffed a laugh.

‘Laura would actually eat us if we skipped.’ Cora grumbled. ‘And your dad would be pissed.’

‘At least they care enough to make us go.’ Derek pointed out. ‘Jackson and Danny had early practice today.’ He gently shoved Scott’s shoulder. ‘Why aren’t you there?’

‘Noah is still kind of freaked.’ Scott was glued to his phone. ‘And I wanted to be around when Kira starts. It’s her first day today.’

Derek grinned and looked at Stiles who winked at him. Scott did smell smitten.

The ride to school was uneventful and they all piled out in the parking lot just as Boyd’s truck pulled in. Derek took the opportunity to corner Stiles while they waited.

‘Peter wants you at the shop today.’ he said. ‘Something about learning defensive magic.’

‘Cool.’ Stiles perked up. ‘Can I bring Harley?’

‘Sure.’ Derek took his hand.

The school was busy as usual, kids steaming along through the corridors. They went to their lockers first, Stiles leaning against the one next to Derek’s while he got his books, frowning and looking past Derek’s shoulder just as Derek heard Jackson and Danny coming their way. His cousin skidded to a stop, looking unusually ruffled.

‘What is it?’ he asked.

‘Coach was bitching about how he has to cover English today.’ Danny said. ‘Miss Blake hasn’t turned up for school.’

‘No shit.’ Stiles’ eyes were wide. ‘You were right.’

‘Maybe.’ Danny hedged. ‘But it looks fucking suspicious.’

‘Not only that, but Harris isn’t here either.’ Jackson added. ‘And while we’d all be celebrating a Harris free day, I’ve got the feeling this is not a good thing.’

‘Fuck.’ Derek let his head thunk against his locker. ‘No, probably not.’

-

Noah sipped his coffee and scanned his emails. He was feeling a lot more rested than he had been on Friday. Saturday and Sunday had been quiet and given him a chance to regroup. Laura was understandably taking a few days off and he and Tara had agreed between them not to bother her with anything that wasn’t immediately life threatening.

She came into his office a few minutes later, a file in her hands.

‘I ran the name you asked me to.’ she said. ‘There’s Jennifer Blake at the address she gave the school. In fact, all the details that you gave me for her turn up as dead ends.’

‘Shit.’ Noah set down his mug. He’d been given the name and other information by Stiles, although his son had demurred when asked just why he should be looking at the English teacher at the high school. Peter had seemed pretty sure that the intel was good and now it seemed that he was opening a can of worms.

‘Yeah.’ Tara made a face. ‘You can bet I’m not pleased about the school’s referencing system. They didn’t even do a proper background check on her. Probably just thankful they could find someone to work there.’

She set the file down on his desk and Noah perused it, more and more alarm bells going off. The social security number did belong to a Jennifer Blake, but Tara’s digging had shown up that the woman in question had died the year before in a car accident in Ohio. Her bank account, cell phone and driver’s license were all recently issued as well, only a month before she had moved to Beacon Hills.

‘How the hell did she get this past them?’ he asked, flipping through the papers.

‘Told them all her personal effects were lost in a fire and probably used a glamour to make sure they didn’t ask anything else.’ Tara replied.

‘So this woman basically turned up out of nowhere?’ Noah huffed and stood up. ‘I think we need to go talk to the school.’

‘I already did.’ Tara replied. ‘Guess who didn’t show up this morning. I think she knows we’re on to her.’

‘Goddammit.’ Noah headed for the door, grabbing his jacket from the rack. ‘Come on. Let’s go pay the principal a visit.’

-

Stiles rested his head on his arms, only half-listening to Finstock rant about the connection between the economy and snowcones. Next to him, Derek was tapping his pencil against the desk, clearly agitated. All the wolves were on edge since the little revelation that Miss Blake was absent, Danny’s hypothesis that she was the Darach looking far more likely than it had before.

Erica huffed and sank in her seat and Stiles smirked at her. She caught his eye and winked and he felt that warm glow inside that he got whenever he thought back to the puppy pile and how she’d called him pack. On her other side, Lydia’s seat was conspicuously empty, as was Allison’s. She’d sent Derek a text earlier saying that she was staying off school to help him with Kate and Theo. Stiles knew that there was so much shit she must be dealing with. He was having a hard time but it was nothing compared to knowing what her aunt had turned into.

His phone buzzed in his pocket and Stiles eased it out, glancing at the screen. It was Harley.

So have you heard that Blake and Harris are awol?

Stiles looked up to see Derek watching him. He mouthed ‘Harley’ and tapped out a reply.

Yeah. How about them apples huh?

We need to talk. This shit is getting serious.

You say that now?????

Ha. Meet me in the quad. We're skipping class.

Stiles frowned and tilted the screen so Derek could see it. He raised an eyebrow at him but didn't say anything until the bell rang and they all bolted out of their seats, desperate to escape Finstock, who was still going even as they filed out the room.

Harley was leaning against the wall waiting for them.

'So Mom told me that two people are missing,' she said. 'Both of them ex-military. Remember what Peter said about warriors?'

'Jeez,' Derek huffed. 'Things just keep getting worse.'

'She needs three though, right?' Erica asked.

'That's the theory,' Harley said, arms folded. 'But Harris is missing.'

'So what?' Stiles looked at her. 'What's the connection.'

'The connection is that Harris is ex-Marine Corps.' It was Danny, looking more worried than he had the previous night. 'I did a little digging when I heard he hadn't shown up this morning.'

'Oh fuck,' Stiles grimaced and felt Derek step a little closer. 'What the hell are the chances that it's just an unhappy co-incidence?'

'I'd say none,' Harley muttered. 'We need to get us all together and come up with a plan.'

-

Alan Deaton knew something was wrong when he woke up. There was an alien buzzing under his skin that had him dialling his sister's number to check in, making a frustrated noise when he got her voicemail.

'Marin?' He moved through his living room, shrugging into his jacket. 'I think something's very wrong. Call me as soon as you get this.'

He opened his front door, only briefly registering a woman standing on his doorstep. She smiled, her pretty face and pastel clothing a complete contrast to the ugliness he saw in her aura just before she raised a hand and got him around the throat.

'Hello Alan. Long time, no see,' she said and lifted him right off the ground. He kicked out at her, hands scrabbling at hers, but the strength she had cut off his air so completely that it was only a matter of moments before he slid into unconsciousness.

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Noah strode down the corridor of the school. Tara had stayed with the cruiser and he made short work of getting to the office. Just as he was about to go in, he heard Stiles' voice.

'Dad!'

Noah turned and saw him approaching, Harley and Derek with him.

'Hey kid,' He frowned at the look on their faces. 'What's going on.'

'Not here,' Stiles grabbed his arm and pulled him to the side. He glanced around and then looked

at Noah, his brown eyes manic. 'We think the Darach's completed the next set.'

'What?' Noah felt a chill go down his spine.

'The two missing people from the weekend.' Harley explained. 'There's a third.'

'Mr Harris was a marine.' Derek said. He was standing right behind Stiles, almost twitching with protective anxiety. 'And he's not here today. He hasn't turned up for work.'

'Shit.' Noah got hold of his radio. 'Tara? Are you there?'

'Sheriff?' Tara sounded flustered. 'We have a situation. Someone just called in that they saw Alan Deaton being abducted from outside his house.'

'What?' Noah looked astounded and Stiles knew how much it took to throw him.

'The witness described the kidnapper was a woman - thirties, white, brown hair. Definitely fits Jennifer Blake or whatever her name is.' Tara said. 'She was completely brazen about it, just dragged him down the drive and threw him in her car. It's a dark blue Station wagon, tag number 6 Lima Delta 7250. I've put out an APB but I'm guessing that the car might not be found. I'm pretty sure she'll be capable of disguising it with magic so this is probably useless intel.'

'Not necessarily.' Harley said and they all looked at her. 'I mean, we can try and track her. If we have a starting point, I can do a locator spell. I just need something of hers.'

'Where are we going to get something of hers?' Derek asked and Harley grinned.

'She works here?' She gave him an expectant look. 'Her classroom will have stuff in it that belongs to her. I just need you to sniff out her scent on something and we can tap in that way.'

'She's right.' Tara sounded terribly proud. 'Atta girl.'

Harley beamed and Noah turned to Stiles.

'Go with her.' he said. 'I am officially giving you permission to cut school. Get what you need and go somewhere you'll be safe.'

'We can go to the shop.' Derek offered. 'Peter has it warded.'

'And if we need to Stiles and I can upgrade those.' Harley added.

'Good.' Noah nodded decisively. 'I'm going to talk to the principal.'

'Hey dad.' Stiles caught his arm. 'Be careful, okay?'

'I will.' Noah smiled reassuringly at him. 'You too. I need to get on this quickly, so once I'm done here I'm going back to the station to get hold of a warrant for her phone and bank transactions.'

'That's going to take time.' Stiles chewed on his lower lip. 'If I give you a quicker way, do you promise the person won't get in trouble?'

'I'm assuming this is the same person that gave you the initial information?' Noah asked and he nodded. 'Okay, I'll keep their name out of it. Right now, we'll take all the help we can get.'

He went into the office and Harley grabbed Stiles' hand.

'Come on.' She dragged him along and Derek had no choice but to jog to catch up, trying to text

and walk at the same time. Stiles knew without asking that he was talking to Jackson or Danny, telling them what Noah had said.

Stiles' assumption was proven right when they ran into them on the languages corridor.

'He's not going to arrest me, is he?' Danny asked. 'I mean, I have plans for college and don't want to fuck up my record.'

'No. He said he wouldn't.' Stiles said. 'Do you need to go home to get anything?'

'No.' Danny patted his messenger bag. 'I got everything I need right here. What are you doing?'

'Going to get something of Miss Blake's to track her.' Stiles replied. 'Then we're going to Peter's.'

'Good idea.' Jackson said. 'We'll head out now.' He towed Danny away and they moved towards the classroom that belonged to Miss Blake. It was thankfully empty and they quickly ducked inside and shut the door, Stiles standing watch.

'You should text the others.' Derek said from the front. 'Tell them what we're doing.'

'Okay.' He started typing, keeping an eye on Harley and Derek. Harley was picking things up and Derek was sniffing them, then shaking his head.

Erica messaged back a second later.

What can we do?

Run interference for us? Stiles replied. Make sure that nothing shady goes down here?

On it. Tell D I'll make sure Cora is safe.

Stiles glanced at Derek, watching how he was sniffing a soft pink scarf that Harley had found in the desk, his whole face crinkling up in disgust.

'It smells like someone exploded a cotton candy factory.' he complained and Harley snorted, still digging. She made a triumphant noise and came back out with a pen bag.

'How about this?' she asked and Derek nodded, his pale eyes going wide.

'That.' He stared at the bag as if it were a bomb. 'It smells like her. Now I'm noticing, it smells really weird. Human, but off.' He blanched. 'And mistletoe.'

'That a problem?' Stiles was confused.

'It's poisonous to werewolves.' Derek explained, taking a careful step away from Harley with his hands behind his back and his nose crinkled.

'Sounds about right.' She shoved the pen bag in her backpack. 'Stiles, can we take your car?'

-

Allison yawned and rubbed her eyes. She shifted position on her seat and then startled when a gentle hand came down on her shoulder.

'Sorry.' It was Noshiko Yukimura. Allison was a little in awe of her. She'd learned a bit about the kitsunes helping them and Chris had let slip that Noshiko was nine hundred years old and Celestial

Kitsune with a full nine tails. It boggled the mind to try and compute those particular facts, especially after seeing how Noshiko and Kira interacted like any regular mother and daughter.

It had also hurt. She had had so little time to get to grips with what her mother had done and the manner of her death and she had so much turmoil raging inside her, most of it now directed at the sleeping form in the cell that they were holding Kate in. It was one of their larger cages, the bars reinforced to hold a feral wolf or something similar. Kate was currently in her alpha form, but she'd shifted back long enough the night before to try and wheedle her way out of the cage.

It had not been a good night.

'Have you had any sleep?' Noshiko asked, and her dark eyes were full of concern.

'Not really.' Allison confessed. Noshiko sat down next to her and reached out, a hand on Allison's.

'She's losing herself more and more every day.' She nodded at Kate. 'Soon, there will only be the wolf.'

'I lost her even before that.' Allison sighed. 'Did my dad tell you what happened. How she got bitten in the first place?'

'Yes.' Noshiko replied. 'And what he didn't know, Satomi filled in for me. The alpha she killed as someone I knew, although not very well.'

'I'm sorry.' Allison felt the gut wrenching shame she had ever since she'd found out about the illegal hunt. 'This is not what the Code is supposed to mean.'

Noshiko gave her a sympathetic look.

'We all have things that make us question our place in this world.' She shrugged. 'When I was younger, I was responsible for bringing something into this world that caused destruction and chaos. It was during the war and I was in an internment camp. I was so angry that I summoned a creature to help me get revenge on those who would harm me, but it went wrong. It killed many many people before I could make it right.'

'What was it?' Allison asked.

'A Nogitsune. It's a type of kitsune that feeds on pain.' Noshiko replied. 'I took both Satomi and I to contain it, but by then it had killed everyone with us in the internment camp and possessed the body of my lover. It was wearing his face when I killed him with this.' She indicated the katana that she carried seemingly everywhere with her.

'How did you do it?' Allison whispered, looking at the creature that had once been her aunt.

'I knew that what I was looking at wasn't Rhys.' Noshiko said, her face sad. 'There was only the monster left.'

'That's the problem.' Allison felt her eyes prickle as tears threatened. 'It turns out that Kate was a monster long before that.'

'Laura said as much.' Noshiko took her hand and squeezed it. 'As matriarchs, our path is never easy but I will tell you that I see fire and steel in you, Allison Argent. Talia would have treated with you just as her daughter has done. You can change the destiny of your family and be an honourable woman.'

‘Thank you.’ Allison gave her a misty smile. ‘I hope that you will consider me an ally too. You and Kira have helped so much with this and I feel like I could learn so much from you.’

‘When this is done, we will stand together.’ Noshiko said. ‘I’ll take you to meet Satomi as well. Human and supernatural can coexist. I’ve seen it and with your help, we can bring back balance to Beacon Hills.’

‘I’d like that.’ Allison smiled and Noshiko returned it.

‘Go get some rest.’ She nodded at the cots set up at the wall of the holding facility. ‘I’ll keep watch for a while.’

Allison obeyed, stumbling gratefully to the closest one and practically collapsing onto it, asleep almost before her feet were off the floor.

-

Peter was waiting for them when they got to the shop and Derek knew he’d been contacted about the warriors going missing.

‘Get inside.’ he hissed, closing the door and locking it behind them.

Derek led them to the stairs, glancing back to see Peter peak through the heavy curtains at the front. He could smell the disquiet on him.

‘Are we going up?’ Stiles asked, already halfway, his hand on the bannister.

‘Yes.’ Peter said. ‘And be quick about it.’

Upstairs Derek took out his keys and unblocked the door to the small apartment that he’d had his eye on. Now part of him shyly wondered if Stiles would like it, if it would prove suitable for a mate. It wasn’t much - a small kitchen, bathroom and living area. There was another staircase that led up to two other rooms, one with a dirty skylight that he’d thought would be suitable for sleeping. Now it was all crammed with boxes but he knew there was potential.

He opened the door and then inhaled sharply. The main area had been cleared and the floor to ceiling windows at the end of the room were visible. Dust motes drifted through the air and the scarred hardwood floors were still under a thick layer of it but it was open.

‘I moved everything into the basement.’ Peter explained, moving past them. ‘We’ll need the space up here if you and Stiles are...’ He broke off when Derek made frantic gestures at him. Thankfully, Stiles was at the windows with Harley, although he did turn around and give them both a quizzical look. A moment later he went delightfully pink.

‘Is this a mate thing?’ he asked and Derek nodded, going over to him.

‘Peter said I could live here after college.’ he said, voice dipping low. He hadn’t wanted to do this with an audience, but Harley’s grin reassured him she thought it was a good thing. ‘I was kind of hoping that maybe...’

‘We could be roommates?’ Stiles’ eyes were sparkling with mischief.

‘Yeah.’ Derek found himself smiling back. Even in all of the turmoil around them, his heart still

starting leaping like a springtime pup.

‘Jesus.’ Peter rolled his eyes at them. ‘Come on lovebirds, we’ve got shit to do.’

-

Noah got back to the station to find two boys waiting for him. He recognised Jackson and Danny and raised an eyebrow at them.

‘I was under the impression you both had school today.’ he said and Jackson snorted.

‘You told Stiles to cut.’ he retorted. ‘And trust me, you’re going to want us here.’ He looked at Danny, who held up his messenger bag. Noah frowned and then realised what the connection was.

‘Come in.’ He beckoned to them, heading for the alley that ran down the side of the station. ‘We’ll go in the back.’

He led them up the rear staircase. It led to the evidence locker and a couple of disused offices, a sign of the lack of funding. Normally there would be detectives up there but Beacon Hills had long since failed to attract people. Now he at least knew why.

He opened the door to one of the offices and gestured for them to enter. Inside, He sat down at the conference table and rested his elbow on the chair’s arm, chin between his thumb and forefinger as he looked at Danny unpacking a very sleek and expensive looking laptop and a couple of electronic components he didn’t have a hope in hell of recognising.

‘So you’re the hacker?’ he asked and Danny chuckled.

‘You could say that.’ His dark eyes flicked up to Noah. ‘I like to think of myself as an explorer.’

‘He’s good.’ Jackson sounded proud. ‘He’s been headhunted by every government agency you can think of for after college. Some of them even want him to go in now.’

‘Well, if you can find the Darach it will definitely make it easier on all of us.’ Noah was pretty sure he was mangling the pronunciation, but Jackson and Danny both nodded somberly. ‘So what else have you got? I know you’ve found out she has no history.’

‘She’s good.’ Danny was already tapping away at his keyboard. ‘But I’ve got an edge she doesn’t.’ He grinned but didn’t look up. ‘Have you ever heard of technomancy?’

‘Techno-what?’ Noah looked at Jackson. ‘What in the Sam Hill is that?’

‘It’s a form of magic.’ Jackson replied. ‘It’s not like Stiles. Danny’s magic isn’t inherent like his is. He’s not a witch or a spark but he can do things with machines that normal people can’t.’

‘I’m still human.’ Danny added. ‘My moms dabble, but I’m pretty sure this comes from my donor.’

‘Donor?’ Noah was getting more and more confused.

‘Yeah.’ Danny grinned. ‘They hand picked him to be my dad. He’s a genius and I mean that quite literally.’

‘Where is he now?’ Noah asked, intrigued.

‘In New York.’ Danny replied. ‘I go see him sometimes. He runs a bunch of tech start ups and when he gets bored, he sells them off. He never wanted kids of his own, but he was best friends

with my biological mom at college and they came up with this.’ He made a triumphant noise and then turned the laptop to Noah. ‘So here’s Miss Blake’s school records. It’s got copies of all the documents that she used to apply for the job.’

‘Jesus, kid.’ Noah was impressed. ‘You just hacked the school?’

‘It’s not hard.’ Danny said. He tapped the screen with a finger. ‘Look at her driver’s license. You can tell it’s fake. The same with her degree certificates and her teaching license. All very good forgeries. She’s probably paid someone a lot of money to do this.’

‘Okay, bored now.’ Jackson got up. ‘You going to be okay here, babe?’

‘Sure.’ Danny said easily. ‘But I could use some coffee and something sweet.’

‘On it.’ Jackson headed for the door. ‘Sheriff?’

‘What the hell.’ Noah knew they were probably in for the long haul. ‘Grab me some too and a couple of bear claws.’

He waited until Jackson was gone, then thought about what he needed.

‘Can you get into private security systems with that?’ he nodded at the laptop.

‘I can.’ Danny eyed him. ‘What do you need?’

‘The Darach snatched someone right off their front porch this morning.’ Noah replied. ‘I want to see if anything caught her on tape.’

-

‘We need to prepare.’ Peter had his serious face on. ‘This threat is getting worse by the minute and we can’t fight it physically like we could the alpha.’ His eyes flicked to Derek when he said that and Derek stood a little taller. He had helped and it had gone some way to making him feel like he was giving restitution.

‘Now it’s us, right?’ Harley was examining the pile of books that Peter had laid out on the long table under the window, the only furniture in the room. ‘Mom’s taught me a bit of offensive magic, but not a lot. It gets you noticed by the wrong kinds of people.’

‘Hunters?’ Stiles glanced at Peter and he nodded.

‘Not just them.’ He moved to pick up a smaller book, running his fingers along its cover. ‘This Darach, she’s here because she wants power. She took Laura because she is the alpha and I know she’s interfering with the Nemeton. We can’t let her get her claws into it otherwise there’s not telling how powerful she will be.’

‘The sacrifices.’ Harley leaned back against the table. ‘What exactly is she getting from them.’

‘The virgins were to restore her beauty and give her the power of seduction and the appearance of innocence.’ Peter said. ‘The warriors give her strength and combat skills. This is already the worst kind of outcome, but she still needs to have three more sacrificial groups before she can access the power on her own. I think Laura was supposed to be a shortcut but we got in the way.’

‘A shortcut?’ Derek growled. ‘She was going to kill Laura?’

‘Probably, once she’d dealt with us.’ Peter’s eyes flashed once. ‘An alpha would yield an enormous

amount of power, probably enough to unleash the Nemeton if she could tap directly into it.' This time his' eyes went to Stiles and Derek had to dig his claws into his hands at the implication.

'Stiles too?' He could feel his fangs pricking his lips. 'Not a goddamn chance.'

'Me?' Stiles scratched his head. 'I guess that makes sense. I mean, I'm a walking battery pack.'

'Not only that but you are also now connected to the Nemeton once again and you have a mate in the pack.' Peter tapped the book with a claw. 'I cannot emphasise just how dangerous this whole clusterfuck has just gotten. We need to be sure you can defend yourself and the pack if you need to.' He handed the book to Stiles. 'That cost over half a million dollars, so please don't spill anything on it.'

'Cool.' Stiles opened the book, his eyes going wide. 'So what are we going to learn?'

'Harley.' Peter turned to her. 'The fire you made. Can you do it again and show me?'

'Sure.' Harley grinned. 'But I want something in return if I help. I want to learn too. I'm not a spark, but I'm not bad as a witch.'

'I have just the thing.' Peter smiled and picked up another book to give to her. 'Tell me, what do you know about Marie Laveau?'

-

Noah was amazed. He crammed the last of his bear claw in his mouth and stared at the dancing code on Danny's screen.

'I don't know how you're doing that.' he said. 'But I'm starting to buy the whole computer wizard thing.'

'The whole track starts in Texas.' Danny was looking intently at the screen. 'That's when she appears.'

'Texas.' Noah took out his mobile and dialled. 'Hey Chris. Listen, you said that the thing with your father, Victoria and Kate was in texas, right?'

'Yes.' Chris sounded suspicious. 'Why?'

'I think we've got a lead.' Noah got up and moved to the window. Down in the rear parking lot, he could see Tara getting out of her cruiser.

'Really?' Chris sounded as if he was on the move. 'Are you at the station?'

'I am.' Noah frowned. A dark blue station wagon had just pulled into the parking lot and his blood went cold when he saw a woman with light brown hair get out the car. 'Fuck!'

'Sheriff?' Danny asked but Noah was already running. He made for the stairs, hurtling down them even as he heard gunshots, throwing open the rear door just in time to see Tara struggling with the woman, who had one hand around Tara's throat and was dragging her towards the car. Tara's sidearm was on the ground and Noah skidded to a stop, his own weapon drawn.

'Stop right there!' he yelled. 'Let her go, Miss Blake!'

Jennifer Blake turned around and for a second her pretty face flickered out of focus, revealing a horrifically scarred visage. Her whites were so pale as to be almost white and they burned into him.

'I'm sorry Sheriff.' She could have been smiling but Noah realised with horror that her lips had been cut away so it was impossible to tell. 'I can't do that.'

Noah started to pull the trigger, but then she raised a hand and the weapon flew from his grasp and he was flung hard against the wall behind him. He collapsed to the ground, grunting in pain as she got Tara in the car and then herself, leaving nothing behind but the screech of tires and the stink of rubber on asphalt.

-

Stiles faltered. He opened his eyes, rubbing his chest where a sickening feeling had just set up camp.

'Something's happened.' he said and then realised that Harley had both hands over her mouth, looking utterly distressed. Peter and Derek, who'd been unpacking a box that Peter had brought down from the floor above, moved to them both. Peter had his hands on Harley's shoulders, gently shaking her.

'Harley.' His eyes were gold. 'Look at me. What's wrong?'

'It's the Darach.' Harley started sobbing. 'She's taken my mom.'

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the lovely comments on the last chapter!!! I haven't had time to reply individually but please know that I really appreciate every single one and once holidays start, I'll be right back.

Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Everything starts to come to a head.

T/W: Minor character death (NOT Tara, I promise) See end notes for spoilers.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tara came back to consciousness slowly. The first thing she registered was pain and then other things started to creep in. The air was cool against her face and she could smell damp earth and vegetation. Wherever she was it was dark and when she got a little clearer in the head, she could feel the magic buzzing under her skin.

She tried to move but found she was restricted by what felt like rope around her wrists and arms. She was hanging, her hands tied to a support beam set into the earthen roof above her and her bound feet hanging off the ground. A groan sounded to her right and Tara peered through the darkness to make out someone else, inhaling sharply when she recognised him.

‘Dr Deaton!’ she hissed it, hoping not to alert the Darach that she was awake. He groaned again and she could just make out his face as his eyes opened. He seemed startled and then did the same thing she had done, trying to get away from where he was tied like she was.

‘Deputy Graham?’ He grunted with the effort of trying to turn enough to see her. ‘She took you as well?’

‘And me.’ The voice came from the other side of him. It was male, deep and instantly recognisable to Tara.

‘Dr Geyer?’ She was starting to panic a little, knowing what three of them meant. ‘Jesus. Okay, we need to get out of here.’

‘How did she get you?’ Deaton asked and Geyer made a disgusted noise.

‘I was dropping Liam off at school.’ he replied. ‘She got in my car at the light and just kind of zapped me. Must have had a taser.’

Tara bit her lip. Geyer was a doctor at Beacon Memorial and a good man. She knew he had no magical affiliation at all though and wondered just what the connection was.

‘I’m guessing we don’t have much time.’ Deaton said, keeping his voice low as well. ‘Look.’ He nodded at the far wall and Tara nearly gagged when she saw the three bodies all slumped over. She could see the one nearest to her, Adrian Harris by the looks of things, had had his throat cut. His face was pasty from blood loss, his eyes open and sightless.

‘She’s killed the warriors.’ Deaton murmured. ‘Guess that makes us the healers and philosophers.’

‘That makes sense.’ Tara’s mind was racing. ‘A druid who’s also a vet, a witch and a doctor.’

‘Yes.’ Deaton sighed heavily. ‘Do you know where we are?’

‘The Nemeton?’ Tara replied. ‘But if we’re here, why haven’t the pack been able to pick up on it?’

‘She’s warded the place.’ Deaton said. ‘She had to build up enough power to be able to do that by killing the virgins. They would be the most potent sacrifices and gave her quite the kick. Once she was able to ward, she took the warriors and brought them underground. Their sacrifice has given her strength enough to take us by force, but she still needs more magic. She’s probably trying to tap directly into the Nemeton down here, although I don’t know how she’ll do that without a link.’

‘Okay.’ Geyer sounded confused as hell, and Tara didn’t blame him. ‘Do either one of you want to explain just what the hell you’re talking about?’

Tara sighed and looked at Deaton.

‘Okay.’ she said. ‘Just know that it’s going to change everything you think you know.’

-

Stiles stood at the foot of the hospital bed, chewing his nails into oblivion and trying not to cry. He’d driven straight to the station but they’d found nothing but chaos when they’d got there. A brief explanation from Jackson and Danny saw them headed to the hospital following the ambulance that was carrying Noah while Peter had taken a distraught Harley with him to the pack house. Derek had elected to stay by his side and Stiles had never been more grateful.

‘Hey.’ Derek had his arm around him and he squeezed. ‘He’ll be okay.’

Stiles nodded, sniffing quietly. Melissa looked up from where she was standing on the other side of the bed, Noah’s chart in her hands.

‘It’s a severe head injury.’ she said. ‘He’s also got a fractured arm and a couple of cracked ribs. We won’t know more until we get him into the MRI.’

‘Why won’t he wake up?’ Stiles’s voice wavered and next to him, Derek growled softly as he tried to reassure.

‘I’m not sure.’ Melissa said and put the chart down. She wrapped her arms around herself and looked at Derek. ‘What happens now?’

‘Peter’s at the house.’ Derek replied. His phone had been buzzing almost constantly as everyone had checked in. Jackson and Danny had gone almost as soon as they had and the rest of the pack at school had piled into Boyd’s truck and joined them. Laura was waiting for them to come back as soon as they had news about Noah and was liaising with Chris and Noshiko.

‘You should go then.’ Melissa said. ‘I need to be here.’ She looked at Stiles, her eyes pleading. ‘You’ll make sure Scott is safe?’

‘Of course.’ Derek was the one to answer because Stiles couldn’t. All he could do was look at his father, lying there so still. They had him hooked up to a heart monitor and the blip was a horrifying reminder that all of this was real. He turned and Derek caught him, strong arms around him to hold him steady.

‘I got you.’ he murmured and Stiles threw his arms around him and clung on.

-

‘She’s quieted down.’ Lydia said as she came into the living room. Harley had been close to hysterical when they’d gotten her to the house and they’d put her in the spare room, the betas and Kira looking after her.

‘Noah’s out of commission.’ Peter was pacing angrily, his eyes burning gold. ‘Melissa is going to stay with him at the hospital and Chris is going over to stand guard.’

‘Good.’ Laura nodded. ‘Noshiko is still with Allison at the safe house and everyone else is here, apart from Derek and Stiles, who will be staying with Melissa. Even the Darach wouldn’t dare attack a hospital.’

‘You think?’ Peter snarled. ‘She attacked a police station in broad fucking daylight, Laura. I think we can say for sure that she’ll do pretty much anything right now. She’s clearly sacrificed the warriors. Jackson said that she took Tara without even giving her time to fight back, not that she could have. She’s stronger than we are right now.’

‘And she’s got more power from the Nemeton too.’ Lydia pointed out. ‘We need to find her.’

‘She’ll be in the preserve, right?’ Laura asked, looking at Peter.

‘Yes.’ he said. ‘But where the fuck she’s hiding, is anyone’s guess.’

‘We need to draw her out.’ Laura had her phone out. ‘You and me.’

‘What about me?’ Lydia asked. ‘I can help.’

‘No, You need to stay here and make sure that she doesn’t get in.’ Laura went over and kissed the top of her head. ‘You guys are safest here, together. Put Jackson out to patrol the house boundary after dark and make sure that nobody else steps a toe outside. The Darach will have no power over him.’

‘Unless she kills Peter.’ Lydia snarked.

‘She won’t.’ Peter growled. ‘The kanima will only carry out a vengeance that is just. She’s killed innocents and Jackson knows that.’

‘Then it’s settled.’ Laura said. ‘We’ll leave now, get a head start before it gets completely dark.’

‘But what about the sacrifices?’ Lydia asked. ‘Won’t she kill them before then?’

‘No.’ Peter’s shoulders slumped. ‘The next sacrifices are going to be crucifixions, after a fashion. The intent now is to supply the Nemeton with a steady stream of power not to avoid overloading it. It will volatile after being woken in such a violent fashion. The victims will suffocate very slowly. It could take days for them to die.’

‘Oh my God.’ Lydia sat down on the couch, looking stricken. ‘That’s terrible.’

‘No, it’s actually good. It sounds terrible but what she’s going to do to them is what’s going to buy us some time.’ Peter stopped pacing. ‘She’ll need to grab the others soon as well, if she’s going to keep the Nemeton fed.’

‘Who’s next?’ Laura asked.

‘Guardians.’ he replied. ‘Although, what kind of guardian I’m not sure.’

‘Shit.’ Laura sat down next to Lydia. ‘Well, that’s just vague as hell.’

'Tara is a witch.' Lydia said. 'And Deaton is a druid.'

'Philosophers and healers.' Peter replied. 'Actually, has there been anyone else who's gone missing?'

'That's a good question.' Laura said and took out her phone. 'I'll check.'

-

Upstairs, the betas all crowded around and on the bed. Harley had her head in Erica's lap.

'It's kind of funny.' she said. 'Four months ago, you guys would have walked right past me in the hall.'

'Not anymore.' Erica was fierce. 'Now you're pack and we take care of our own.'

'She's right.' Cora was on her other side, knees drawn up. She looked around at the others. 'All in favour?' She grinned when they all raised their hands. 'See?'

'Thank you.' Harley smiled through her tears. 'You're all nuts but I appreciate it.'

'Fuck off.' Cora said, but there was no heat in it. She looked at Jackson, who was watching intently through the window. 'Anything?'

'Something's bugging him.' Danny said from his perch on the end of the bed.

'It feels off.' Jackson didn't take his eyes from the window. 'Like something's coming.'

They all looked at each other and hunkered down a little bit more, none of them wanting to even think about what was coming.

-

'Be careful.' Lydia said. She was on the porch watching as Peter and Laura shed their clothing. The sun was going down, the light fading between the trees and it was making her shiver. She couldn't put her finger on it, but something was very very wrong and at the edge of her consciousness, voices were starting to whisper in a maddening babble.

'We will.' Laura replied, darting back to kiss her. 'I promise.'

She shifted, bones cracking and fur spurting until she was on all fours. Peter followed suit, his coat iron grey and his eyes golden to Laura's crimson. They darted off into the trees and Lydia waited until they were out of sight before she turned back to go inside.

On the threshold she stopped, feeling something that made her turn back and stare into the trees. The darkness seemed to be coming on much faster than normal and Lydia's eyes widened. She cursed and hurried inside, sighing in relief when the wards snapped into place and the feeling of dread dissipated.

'Lydia?' It was Jackson. He came down the stairs and Lydia let him pull her into a hug.

'Laura wants you patrolling when it gets dark.' she told him. He pulled her closer and nodded. Chin resting on her head.

'She'll be okay.' he murmured. 'Laura's the alpha.'

'I know.' Lydia muttered. 'That's what I'm worried about.'

-

Laura ran, her paws thudding on the ground. Peter was at her side, silent as a shadow. They both knew the preserve inside and out and she led them towards the western boundary of their territory and where they'd found the first sacrifices close to the Nemeton. It was as good a place as any to start looking.

She tracked their markers, using her nose to make out the way they should be headed and for a long time she didn't realise anything was wrong. It was only when she started to feel like she should have arrived already that she slowed to a trot and then finally stopped.

She shifted back to human, startling as she saw mist rising from the ground. Next to her, Peter also shifted back and they moved to stand back to back. She could feel all her senses going on alert and knew he was the same, beta shifted when she looked at him.

'This is not right.' he growled and Laura nodded, looking up. The trees all seemed wrong and whichever direction she turned in, the forest seemed to go on forever.

'Fuck.' she snarled. 'Which way is the Nemeton?'

Peter wheeled around, his face becoming more and more perturbed.

'I don't know.' He lifted his head, scenting the air. 'Can you smell that?'

Laura sniffed, her stomach lurching in fear.

'No.' She met his eyes and they were as panicked as his own. 'I can't smell a goddamned thing.'

'It's her.' Peter's claws were out. 'She's cast a glamour on the whole fucking place. We're lost in it.'

Laura had to work hard to control herself. It felt like she was completely on edge and so she shifted back, the wolf mindset going a long way to calm her. Peter did the same and she nosed at him once and then started running again.

There had to be a way out somehow.

-

Allison yawned and washed her hands. She was exhausted, the last few nights taking their toll on her. Unlike Noshiko and Kira, she didn't have supernatural stamina to keep herself going so caffeine drinks and sugary foods were having to substitute. As if on cue, her stomach growled and she decided that she needed a snack.

The building was quiet when she left the bathroom, but that didn't bother her at first. The kitsunes both moved like shadows and she went downstairs, thinking about what she could find in their makeshift kitchen. It was only when she went past the room they were holding Kate and Theo in that she stopped dead, taking in the sight in front of her.

Noshiko was shifted, her eyes blazing orange. She was hammering on the invisible barrier that contained her, her fists making it flare bright white with every blow. She was screaming for Allison, but there was no sound and Allison's brain caught up quick enough to realise that the hideously scarred creature currently standing there was the one responsible. She hadn't seen the Darach for herself but she wasted no time, her hand flying to her belt for her weapon but then she

was gripped by an invisible force and pinned up against the wall behind her, battling for air as whatever it was wrapped itself around her throat and squeezed.

Allison scrambled at her throat as the Darach walked over with no particular rush, her face stuck in its rictus grin.

‘You can’t escape, little hunter.’ she crooned. ‘Normally, I would have killed you but I think leaving you alive knowing you could do nothing to stop me will be so much more satisfying.’ She reached up, dragging a gloved finger along Allison’s jaw. ‘You’re an honourable creature too. Not like her.’

Allison looked over the Darach’s shoulder at where Kate was snarling and throwing herself at the bars of her cage, clearly out of her mind with rage.

‘You don’t have to do this.’ she gasped. ‘She will pay for whatever crimes she committed.’

‘Stupid little girl.’ The Darach tilted her head. ‘You don’t know what you’re talking about. I used to have a mate, a pack. Your aunt took that from me and made me this.’

Allison grimaced as the hold on her throat tightened. She turned her head as the Darach leaned in, her breath fetid on Allison’s cheek.

‘I had nothing to do with that.’ she choked out. ‘I am trying to fix things.’

‘With the Hale pack, yes.’ The Darach hissed. ‘But where were you when my pack and my mate were slaughtered by your family? Too little, too late little girl.’

Allison wanted to scream but then all her air was cut off and everything went black.

-

‘Tara.’ Deaton’s voice was strained and she blinked to clear her vision and focused on him as best she could. The pain in her arms and shoulders was excruciating and even her magic wasn’t enough to ease it. She could feel how she was slowly being stripped away, little by little. Next to her Deaton was looking awful, his skin greying and his face shiny with sweat. Tara had wondered what the end game was with the Darach but now she knew that they were fueling her connection to the Nemeton, as well as giving up their own power. Deaton was having the worst of it, his status as the former Hale emissary meaning his bond with the Nemeton was stronger and more easily manipulated.

‘Alan.’ She tried to sound calm. ‘You have to fight it.’

‘I can’t.’ Deaton wheezed, his head drooping. ‘It’s taking everything I’ve got.’

He fell silent and Tara tried to throw off some of the thrall the Nemeton held her in, just enough that she could feed a bit of her own magic into him and keep him alive longer.

‘What’s happening to him?’ Geyer asked. He sounded terrified and Tara didn’t blame him one bit.

‘The thing that’s keeping us here is trying to meld herself to the magic centre of the preserve.’ she replied. She and Deaton had given Geyer enough of a rundown of the situation. ‘She’s using us as a power source for herself and keeping the connection between herself and the Nemeton open. Deaton’s dying.’

‘Shit.’ Geyer started trying to free himself again. ‘If I can just get out...’

'It's not that simple, Doctor Geyer.' Deaton was resigned. 'The Nemeton has drained most of my life force and transferred it to the connection. Human medicine will not stop that from happening.' He looked at Tara. 'Please, before it takes me. I need you to give Laura a message.'

'Of course.' Tara felt sick inside. She knew that he only had a few moments left, could see the way his aura was starting to go white and faded at the edges.

'I was wrong,' Deaton told her. 'I knew what the Nemeton wanted and I diverted fate for my own selfish gains. It killed the true emissary and it killed the pack I had sworn to protect and now I'm paying the price for it as well.' He managed to lift his head one last time, his dark eyes fixed on hers. 'Stiles is the heir to this land. He can break her hold on the Nemeton and restore it to how it should always have been. Tell Laura that. He's her emissary.'

'I will.' Tara's vision blurred as tears finally came. 'I'm sorry, Alan. Go well into the darkness.'

Deaton's mouth quirked and then he gasped, his breath changing as the last of his magic slipped away and he stopped breathing. His aura faded completely from sight and his head fell forward, his whole body slumping as he died. Tara gritted her teeth, the hold on her own magic getting stronger as what had been Alan Deaton was sucked up into the Nemeton and claimed as its own.

'That was fast.' Geyer whispered. 'Only seven hours.'

'I know.' Tara said. 'And it's only a matter of time before it takes us too. We need to get the hell out of this.'

'I second that.' Geyer muttered. 'The question is how?'

Tara wanted to scream in frustration. Her connection to Harley was completely blocked by the Darach's spell on the Nemeton and she didn't have a clue how else to contact someone. All she could do was hope like hell the pack would find them soon.

-

The sound of footsteps heading their way had Derek lifting his head. He was sitting outside Noah's room and when he saw Chris, he breathed a sigh of relief. It had been a few hours at least since they had brought Noah in and there had been absolutely no change. Stiles was still in his room, Melissa completely bending the rules to let him stay there but the smell of guilt and despair had gotten to much for Derek, hitting too close to home so that he needed a break.

'Hi.' Chris said when he got to him. 'How is he?'

'Melissa said he's in a coma.' Derek replied. 'Whatever happened, he isn't waking up. It could be concussion but it could also be something else.'

'Shit.' Chris took a seat next to him. Derek eyed him as surreptitiously as he could. He was still very wary of the adult hunter and he tried to spot the telltale outline of a weapon on him. Chris caught him looking and grinned wryly.

'Sorry.' Derek muttered, looking at his feet. 'I guess I'm just...' He trailed off and Chris sighed.

'I don't blame you.' he said, his voice low. 'I know that I still have to earn your pack's trust. We're allies but it's understandable that you are cautious. I tell Allison to be like that too. You can't trust too easily in this.'

'No shit.' Derek muttered. 'That's what started all of this.'

'No.' Chris shook his head. 'Kate would have found a way, even if you'd done things differently. She wasn't one to give up.'

He sounded melancholy and Derek glanced at him.

'For what it's worth, I know what it's like to lose somebody.' he said. 'Or a whole lot of somebodies.'

'Yeah.' Chris said. 'And for what it's worth, I really appreciate how you have been with Allison.' Sadness seeped into his scent, vinegary and sharp. 'She hasn't had it easy and I know that she's finally got some friends that she trusts.'

Derek managed a small smile at that and then sat up straighter as Melissa approached. She gave him and Chris a worried look and beckoned for them to follow her into an empty room across the hall.

'What's wrong?' Chris asked as soon as they were inside.

'Dr Geyer was supposed to be working the night shift.' she said. 'He hasn't come in. We called his wife and she said she hasn't heard from him since he dropped their son off at school. She just assumed he'd come in early and been caught up.'

'What?' Chris went white. 'So with Deaton and Tara, this makes three?'

'We need to call Peter.' Derek said, taking out his phone. He rang but it went straight to voicemail, so he tried Laura. That did the same thing and he felt the beginnings of fear in his gut. He started going through the pack, but one after another the numbers all clicked off until the tinny sounds of recorded voices replaced them.

'Derek?' Chris and Melissa were watching him.

'Something's wrong.' he growled. 'None of the pack are answering their phones.'

'Shit.' Chris had his own out. When his face fell, Derek knew that Allison wasn't answering either.

'I need to go.' He started to push past Chris but as soon as he was in the corridor he froze. Stiles was coming out of the room, his brown eyes red-rimmed and his face puffy from crying.

'What happened?' he demanded. 'I felt you panic.'

'You have to stay here.' Derek got him by the shoulders. 'I need to go check on the pack. None of them are answering their phones.'

'No!' Stiles grabbed at him, his hands holding onto Derek's shirt with a white knuckled grip. 'You are not going anywhere without me!'

'He's right.' Chris said. He looked at Melissa and then dragged her to the side, taking out a handgun from where it was concealed in a holster at his back. 'Can you use one of these?'

'I...' Melissa looked between them all frantically and then nodded. 'Yes, I can.'

'Good.' Chris handed it to her. 'It's loaded with mistletoe rounds. If that botch comes for you, you empty every damn shit into her, got it?' He looked at Derek over her head. 'You'll take the pack?'

'Yes.' Derek nodded, grabbing Stiles' hand. 'Allison?'

'I'm on my way.' Chris was already leaving. 'I'll call you when I know what the fuck is going on.'

Derek didn't wait. He started moving, Stiles running alongside him to keep up. He didn't let go of Derek's hand all the way down to the parking lot, finally pulling away to scramble for his keys. Derek gently wrested them from his grip.

'I'll drive.' he said and Stiles gave him a wobbly smile and went to get in the passenger side.

'My knight in fake fur.' He was trying to be snarky but it just came out vulnerable and Derek took a second to catch him around the back of the neck and kiss him fiercely.

'Listen to me.' he said and Stiles lifted his eyes to look at him. 'We are going to get your dad back. I don't care what we have to do, okay? And if we can't get him back the normal way, then we get Tara to fix him with magic or Laura to bite him. Either way, I promise you're going to have your dad back.'

Stiles started crying silently, tears sliding down his cheeks and making his eyes glitter.

'I love you.' he whispered. 'Derek, I'm so scared.'

'I know, baby. I love you too.' Derek kissed him again, trying to put everything he felt into it. He finally let him go and started the jeep, one arm along the back of the seat as he turned to pull out.

They drove in silence, taking the road from downtown to Industry Bridge. Derek tried to drive carefully, sticking to the speed limit all the way until they were past Greenvale Park and then slamming on the gas and using his werewolf reflexes to get them to the preserve as fast as he could.

It was starting to rain and he peered through the windshield long enough to see black clouds rolling in overhead.

'Well, that's not normal.' he growled and then winced when something lanced through him. It was like a metal pole right through his chest and he had to slam on brakes and catch his breath until it subsided. Next to him, Stiles was panting hard.

'What the fuck was that?' he asked and Stiles lifted his head. His eyes and tattoos were alight and he was holding the heel of one hand to his temple.

'It's the Nemeton.' he said. 'It's like it's overloading in my head.'

'Christ.' Derek put his foot flat, the jeep fishtailing in the rain that was now coming down in torrential sheets. They raced through the trees, the jeep's headlights the only light as the sky went black.

'Come on.' Derek muttered, willing the jeep to go faster. He was filled with dread, every pack bond vibrating with wrongness. He couldn't feel Laura or Peter at all, but it wasn't the same as when his family had died. That was the only thing keeping him sane enough to drive, but then a massive lightning strike came down right in front of them and Stiles screamed.

Derek had just enough time to see the Darach standing there in front of them on the road, her scarred face triumphant as the jeep skidded sideways across the road and flipped, sailing up and up into the air. Inside the cab, Derek bounced around like a ragdoll, trying desperately to reach out for Stiles before the jeep landed on its side, glass shattering and metal buckling before everything went black and he passed out from the pain.

Chapter End Notes

Deaton is consumed by the Nemeton and dies. Not explicitly described.

Chapter 25

Derek came to with a start. He was upside down, his body against the roof of the jeep. He tried to move and howled in pain when he felt the way his legs were sitting wrong. The bones were trying to heal but the way he was situated meant that he couldn't straighten them out so it could happen right.

He took a quick look around, his eyelashes gummed and sticky with the blood that had run into his face from the wound on his head. It looked like he'd connected pretty hard with the window, the glass now shattered and scattered on the ground only a foot from his face like jagged diamonds. He inhaled sharply, the stench of blood and fear encompassing the inside of the jeep and knew that the Darach had taken Stiles. Her corrupted scent was everywhere and Derek roared angrily, his rage giving him the strength to shove and pull and push himself enough that he could get his upper body out of the window, heaving deep pained breaths and sobbing in agony as he dragged himself out the car. His body started to respond instantly, bones shifting and cracking back into place and all Derek could do was lie there, letting the pain wash over him until it was done.

He managed to get one arm under himself, lifting his head up and surveying the wreckage. The bond between him and Stiles was nothing but an empty desolate space and that scared him more than anything. He knew that Stiles was alive. The Darach wouldn't have hidden it from him if his mate was dead. It might have been better if she had, then Derek wouldn't need to think about why she was keeping Stiles alive.

He had one chance to find him but he couldn't do it alone, not as injured as he was. He drew in all the breath he could and howled for his pack.

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'Wait.' Laura froze. They were shifted back, both her and Peter turning until they were dizzy trying to find a way out of the trees they had been lost in for hours.

'I heard it.' Peter panted. His was shiny with sweat and smeared with dirt, exertion and anger making him look almost feral.

They both strained to listen, then startled as another howl went up.

'That was Derek.' Laura's eyes flared red. 'He's hurt.'

'That way.' Peter was already shifting, and he took off as soon as his paws hit the ground. Laura followed, her pack bonds thrumming with the need to get to her little brother and protect him. They ran like shadows and now the preserve looked a little different, more familiar. She didn't know what had done it, but whatever it was, it was working.

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'Break it!' Boyd was close to frantic and Lydia gestured wildly at the shimmering glow of the mountain ash ring around the house. They had heard the crash and all rushed out to help, Laura's directions be damned, only to find that they were sealed inside a barrier the likes of which none of them had encountered before.

'I can't!' she shouted. 'I'm as supernatural as you are.'

'She's right.' Kira was standing with Scott, her hair afloat as she literally crackled with electricity.

‘None of the phones are working.’ Cora was jabbing frantically at hers. ‘Not even the landline inside.’

‘Shit.’ Jackson looked at Harley. ‘It’s got to be you.’

‘My magic doesn’t work like that.’ Harley protested. ‘I’ve never learned how to use mountain ash on this scale before.’

‘You’re the only one.’ Lydia told him and they all watched as Erica and Isaac came running around from the back of the house.

‘No go there either.’ Erica said, her eyes gold and her fangs dropped in agitation. ‘It’s sealed the whole way around.’

‘You’ll need a booster.’ Lydia said to Harley and she looked at the only other human present.

‘Danny.’ Jackson took his hand. ‘You can help Harley do this?’

‘Fuck.’ Danny looked at the barrier and then at Harley. ‘Okay, Here goes nothing.’

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Chris ran until his chest felt like it was going to burst. The warehouse was quiet in a way that terrified him and his fears were proven correct the second he bolted into the main space and saw the empty cage and Noshiko trapped in the mountain ash circle.

‘Allison?’ He looked around, desperately afraid, until he saw her and let out a cry, running to where she lay and falling to his knees. He cradled her as gently as possible, not wanting to jar anything that might be injured. Allison coughed weakly and opened her eyes. They were glassy with pain but she managed to speak, her voice hoarse and her skin pasty.

‘The Darach...’ she started and Chris shushed her.

‘Don’t speak, sweetheart.’ He ran gentle hands over her arms and sides. ‘Just let me get you to the hospital.’

‘No.’ Allison coughed again and this time dark red blood bubbled up between her lips and dribbled down her chin. ‘The Darach took Kate. She’s going to do something horrible.’

‘What?’ Chris looked back at Noshiko, who nodded confirmation.

‘You need to help stop her, Dad.’ Allison was insistent. ‘I think I can make it.’

‘No.’ Chris shook his head. He knew what that dark blood leaking from his daughter’s mouth meant. ‘I’m not going to lose you.’

He froze at the odd sound of Noshiko banging on the barrier behind him. She beckoned him and Chris reluctantly lowered Allison back to the ground and went to her, frowning when she spoke. He made a frustrated gesture and Noshiko took a deep breath and spoke again, slower this time.

Take her to the alpha.

Now he understood and then looked back at Allison, hope replacing fear and bringing determination with it.

‘Will it work?’ he asked. Noshiko tilted her hand.

Fifty-fifty.

‘I’ll take those odds.’

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Tara was fading. She could feel it as surely as she knew her own name. It was getting harder and harder to breathe and she could hear the choked sounds Geyer was making. Deaton was long dead and now the Nemeton was getting ready to suck the life out of her as well.

There was a sound and she could barely lift her head to look but when she did, her eyes went wide. The Darach offloaded the body from her shoulder and when it hit the ground and rolled face up, Tara saw it was Stiles. He was unconscious and bleeding from a gash in his forehead but otherwise he looked intact.

‘No.’ she croaked and the Darach looked up at her.

‘I found our little Spark.’ she hissed. ‘He was coming back to try and save you and his pack.’ She kicked him and Tara made an angry noise. It was all she could do, her own power now far too weak to be of any good.

‘You’re a monster.’ she spat and the Darach laughed.

‘I wasn’t before the Argents got to me.’ she sneered. ‘But once I have the Nemeton under my control, I will show them what a monster really looks like. I will use every drop of its power to slaughter every hunter on the face of this planet, until they are all exterminated.’

‘You’ve killed innocents.’ Tara retorted. ‘You are as bad as they are.’

The Darach snarled at her like an angry animal.

‘They murdered my mate and my pack.’ Her white eyes were deranged. ‘We were peaceful. So were the Hales. So were many others. The sacrifice of a few to save the many balances out in my book.’

‘You don’t know what you’re doing.’ Tara tried again. ‘Unleashing the Nemeton’s power and corrupting it will bring nothing but chaos and misery. You talk of the Hales, but how can you do this to them?’

She recoiled when the Darach got in her face.

‘They’ve set up a treaty with the Argents.’ She spoke with a low voice but her anger was very apparent. ‘They’re not worth saving anymore. Laura Hale is a disgrace to her pack.’

‘That’s not true.’ Tara insisted. ‘Laura is a good alpha. Her pack is young but they are honourable.’

‘Not to me.’ the Darach said and turned away. ‘Now be silent.’

She waved a hand and Tara felt the rush of magic through her, her voice ripped away. She struggled as best she could, watching as the Darach sliced Stiles’ clothing from his still form and then moved to the side, coming back with a glass jar full of what looked like blood. It gleamed with a golden shimmer and Tara knew it was virgin’s blood, probably from her first sacrifices. She remembered Nate’s post mortem, the way his throat had been cut, and shuddered.

The Darach began chanting, something in Latin that Tara didn’t recognise. Her magic was from

Africa, full of rich traditions and blazing heat. She watched as the Darach painted symbols on Stiles' body, using the blood to map out what looked eerily like a map. His tattoos started to glow, but the light inside them was yellowish-green and sickly looking. The final flourish was a triskelion in blood directly over his heart where there was a bare space and when she finished the final spiral, Stiles convulsed as if an electric shock was going through him. He writhed on the ground, his breath coming in short gasps until he fell quiet, almost as if dead. The only thing that gave him away was his aura. Tara could still just make it out, a fierce commingling of red at his core flowing out to white and finally gold at the edges, but even as she watched it started to change. Tendrils of murky green started to filter and Tara felt as helpless as she ever had, watching his Spark was being corrupted.

'Not too long now.' The Darach looked very pleased with herself. 'Soon, I will sacrifice the Argent bitch to the tree and use her to break the connection between them and it will all be mine.' The glee on her face as she left to return to the surface made Tara feel sick to her stomach, especially when the Darach threw back the trap door and she heard the anguished roar of an alpha wolf. The only kindness was that it was clearly Kate and not Laura.

Tara drew on what strength she had left and tried to think. If she could get Stiles out from the influence of the Darach's magic, he would be enough to stop her. His unconscious state would make it difficult as would the spell the Darach had placed on his body but she had to try. She reached out and what she found astonished her. Stiles was fighting. Not only that, but he had a silvery thread of his own magic that she could just feel, probably because she was pack adjacent. It was so faint that the Darach had obviously missed it in her single-minded quest for revenge.

Tara followed it as closely as she could, closing her eyes and tracing the link out from beneath the Nemeton and into the preserve. It had snuck out beneath the thrall of the Darach and was slowly creeping along the ground, spreading out like a great silvery net and she nearly collapsed in relief to feel how it was eating away at the spell overlaying it.

Maybe it would be enough.

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Laura and Peter hit the road between the Stilinski house and the pack house suddenly, almost like stumbling over a log. They skidded into it and the acrid smell of burning hit Laura's nose almost at the same instant she caught sight of two beams of light filtering through the trees.

'Over there!' she ran, shifting mid stride to go faster. They closed in and she saw Stiles' jeep, or what was left of it, lying just off to the side. It looked like it had had a wrecking ball taken to it, wheels in the air and all the windows shattered. She heard the whimper that told her someone was alive and dove right in.

She found Derek lying on his back, panting with effort as he healed. A quick survey showed her that he'd broken both his legs and his back, suffered countless lacerations and a very nasty injury to the back of his head, judging from the way his hair was still soaked with blood. It had run in streaks down his face, making his green eyes stand out shockingly pale.

'Laura.' he croaked, holding out a hand and she fell to her knees, gathering him up and holding him tightly.

'I'm here.' She was vaguely aware of how his blood was smearing her bare skin. 'I'm here, Bun.'

'Jesus.' Peter's eyes were shocked. 'Derek.' He went to kneel on the other side, examining him carefully. 'You're healing?'

‘Yeah.’ Derek managed to nod, then burrowed his head into Laura’s side. ‘Hurts.’

‘I’m not fucking surprised.’ Peter growled. ‘I’m amazed you made it out of that.’ His nose twitched and then he shifted to beta, snarling as he scented the air. ‘It was her.’

‘She came out right in front of us.’ Derek groaned. ‘She flipped the jeep and took Stiles. He was gone when I woke up.’

‘I’m going to kill her!’ Laura’s eyes blazed red. She looked at Peter. ‘The cubs!’

‘I’m going.’ Peter replied and shifted, dashing off into the darkness towards the house.

‘I need to find Stiles.’ Derek was trying to sit up and Laura pressed him back down.

‘You’re hurt.’ she growled and he bared his teeth at her. They were stained with blood and everything inside her wanted to go find the Darach and rip her throat out with her teeth.

‘I don’t care.’ He was starting to struggle and even as hurt as he was, Laura could feel how desperation was making him strong and she had to fight to keep him still, grabbing his wrists and folding his arms over his chest.

‘Derek.’ She used her alpha voice and that just resulted in him whining in utter desolation, his eyes glowing gold up at her.

‘Please.’ he begged. ‘Let me go find him. Imagine if it was Lydia.’

Laura was torn between knowing that nothing would have kept her away and her need to make sure Derek was safe.

‘All right.’ she said. ‘Just be as safe as you can, okay.’

She let him up, steadying him when he swayed on his feet. He stripped quickly and shifted, limping a little but harder in his wolf form. Laura gave him a questioning whine and Derek lifted his snout, sniffing the air. He barked once and took off and she hoped like hell she was making the right choice. She was about to run after him when the sound of a car caught her attention and she saw Chris’ SUV pull up just behind where the jeep had gone off.

‘Fucking hell!’ He hadn’t seen her and she came out of the trees, chuffing when he flailed in surprise, then dropped his eyes when he saw she was naked. ‘Christ, here.’ He reached into the driver’s side and brought out a black hoodie, throwing it to her. Laura rolled her eyes at him but pulled it on. It was so big that it hit her mid thigh and she came closer, her nose wrinkling when she caught the scent of more blood and pain.

‘Allison.’ Chris said, scrambling to open the back door. ‘Noshiko said you could help.’ He smelled distressed and when Laura peered into the back seat, she could see why. Allison was propped up against the other door, her breathing soft and shallow and her shirt stained all the way down the front with blood that had leaked from her mouth.

‘She’s got internal injuries.’ She got into the back, careful not to cause too much movement.

‘Chris, she needs a hospital.’

‘It’s too late for that.’ Chris sounded heartbroken. ‘I know massive internal hemorrhaging when I see it. Noshiko was right. You are the only thing that can help her right now before it kills her.’

Laura gaped at him.

‘You know what you’re asking?’ She couldn’t believe he was actually considering this course of action. ‘I thought it went against everything you believe in. The Hunter’s Council strictly forbids it.’

‘I believe in my daughter living long enough to graduate.’ Chris gritted out. ‘I believe in her living a long and happy life and if that means her taking the Bite so save it, then I don’t give a fuck what the Hunter’s Council would have to say about this.’

‘Okay.’ Laura turned to Allison, taking her hand. ‘Allison. I need you to consent before I do this. I also need you to understand that there is a chance that it doesn’t take and it kills you.’

Allison gave her a shaky nod.

‘I’m dead anyway if I don’t.’ she rasped. ‘I don’t have anything to lose and everything to gain here.’

All right then.’ Laura leaned in and gently moved Allison’s sweater out the way. She winced at the black bruising across Allison’s side and abdomen, knowing that she didn’t have long.

Allison met her eyes when she looked up one last time.

‘Do it.’ she whispered and Laura let her fangs drop.

‘If it takes, you’ll be pack.’ she promised and then lowered her head to sink her fangs into Allison’s side.

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‘Come on!’ Harley gritted her teeth and tried again. The spell the Darach was using was like iron, and she was exhausted from trying to break through the barrier. Danny was behind her, his hands on her shoulders, but it was not budging an inch.

‘Wait.’ Jackson called back from where he was right at the edge of it. ‘Listen.’

All the wolves tilted their heads and then breathed out a collective sigh of relief when Peter’s iron grey form appeared out of the night like a ghost. He barked at them, slowing to a standstill and shifting before eyeing the barrier like he wanted to shred it with his claws.

‘She’s really starting to piss me off now.’ he growled, checking them all over. ‘Is everyone alright?’

‘Yes.’ Lydia replied. ‘But we can’t get out.’

‘I’ve been trying.’ Harley said. ‘But she’s got this shit locked up tight.’

‘She had Laura and I chasing our own tails since we left you.’ Peter made a face. ‘We only got out because the spell seemed to lift and we were able to hear Derek howling for help.’

‘For help?’ Cora’s claws came out on instinct. ‘Why? What happened?’

‘The Darach flipped the jeep.’ Peter explained, pacing back and forth and checking the barrier. ‘She’s taken Stiles.’ He made a considering face. ‘Maybe that’s why his magic did it.’

‘Did what?’ Harley asked, curious.

‘Derek’s his mate and Stiles knew he needed help.’ Peter said. ‘He must have used his magic to

clear a pathway for us so we could get to him when he couldn't.' He grinned. 'Clever little shit.'

'So what about us?' Erica asked. 'We're still stuck here.'

'Not all of you.' Peter said, looking at Harley and Danny. 'Your mom is out there.'

'I know.' Harley looked torn. 'But I'm the only one who can get us out and we'll need all of us.'

'You go.' Lydia said. 'You can get to the Nemeton and see if you can find them. That's the logical place she'll be, especially if she has Stiles.'

'You'll need back up.' Danny started to move forward to cross the line, stopping when Chris' SUV tore into the clearing in front of the house, wheels throwing up dirt as he slammed on the brakes.

Laura fell out the back, dressed in a black hoodie that wasn't hers. Chris was getting out the front, going to the back and giving someone his hand.

'What's going on?' Cora asked, peering at the car. 'Why can I smell...?'

'There's been a development.' Laura replied and the whole pack fell silent as Allison got out the back of the SUV, balancing like a foal on unsteady legs. She looked at them, smiling sheepishly as her eyes flashed gold.

'Hi.' She waved a clawed hand.

'Holy shit.' Lydia stared at her and then at Laura. 'Oh, fuck me. You bit her???'

'I had to.' Laura said. 'She was dying.'

'And she's still not feeling much better.' Allison grimaced with each step closer. 'The Darach really did a number on me.'

'I was going to go after Tara.' Peter said. 'Now you're here, we'll be stronger.' He directed Danny back behind the line. 'Stay and keep helping Harley.'

'I can go with you.' Chris said. 'Many hands and all that.'

'What about Allison?' Boyd asked. 'She can't come in.'

'I'm not staying behind.' Allison stated. 'I'm coming too.'

'Can you keep up?' Laura asked and she nodded.

'Don't worry about me.' She gave her father a cheeky grin, fangs just visible. 'I'll look after the old man here.'

'Then let's go.' Peter said. 'Harley, I promise we're going to bring your mom back.'

'Thank you.' she said and threw her magic back into the barrier again.

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Derek ran.

He had no idea how he knew where to go, but there was something pulling him forward. Stiles would probably have laughed and made a comparison to a tractor beam but it was an excellent

analogy. Derek could no sooner have cut off his own feet than turned from the pathway he was following.

The whole forest was dark, the rain still hammering down. He'd been sheltered under the car before but now he was soaked through, his fur heavy with water. He stopped to shake himself before carrying on, his paws making little noise under the sound of the storm. His body still ached, pain lancing through him every time he stepped wrong but Derek was driven by something more than pain, more than desperation. He was being driven by love and it kept him running. He loved Stiles and he would rather die without him than let him be consumed by the Darach and the Nemeton.

He knew that he was close, the forest looking familiar. It smelled like magic. It seemed to ooze right out of the muddy ground and twist around the trees and when a bolt of lightning came down and struck the rise in front of him, Derek caught the ozone scent and the way it mingled with the smell of magic and his desire to find his mate seemed to increase exponentially.

He focused, everything coming down to the pull he was feeling as he raced on. Stiles needed him and Derek wasn't about to abandon his mate, no matter what the cost.

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

And here we come to the end :) Thank you so much to all the wonderful people who read and left kudos or comments. I really appreciated it all and you made me very happy indeed. Now onto pastures new and a return to Part 2 of the epic saga!!!! Keep an eye out for it. I'm hoping to start posting after summer!

'Mischief.'

Stiles buried his head under the blanket, not wanting to wake up.

'No.' he mumbled. 'Just five more minutes.'

The hand that peeled the comforter back and gently stroked his hair was familiar, as was the waft of lilac perfume and he cracked one eye open.

'Hi there, sleepyhead.' Claudia's smile was bright. She was wearing a yellow plaid flannel over a white t-shirt, her dark hair pulled into a messy ponytail. She looked whole and healthy and he felt his heart ache at the memory.

'You're not real.' Stiles buried his face in the pillow. 'None of this is real.'

'Oh honey.' Claudia sighed and shifted so she could lean down and kiss his temple. 'I'm so sorry. I know this is cruel but you don't have much time and we need you to wake up.'

'We?' Stiles lifted his head and saw Aneta standing just behind his mother.

'The Darach is trying to break open the bond between you and the Nemeton.' she said and the scenery shifted behind her to the clearing in the woods. The huge tree that he'd seen in his visions before was now withered and dying and the sky was a jumble of dark clouds.

'We were going to stop her.' He sat up and rubbed at his eyes. 'Derek?'

'He's alive and coming for you.' Claudia said, taking his face between her hands. 'But she'll get what she wants before then if you don't stop her.'

Stiles looked into his eyes.

'You should have told me.' he said and Claudia's eyes welled up with tears.

'I know.' she replied. 'I'm sorry, baby. A lot of this could have all been avoided if I had. I honestly thought I was doing the the right thing and so did Talia. I didn't know how bad it would be for you to be separated from Derek and how badly you would cope after I died with no-one to guide you. I watched you and your dad drift apart and it killed me.'

'So what? You're here, like really here?' Stiles asked and she shrugged.

'In a way.' she replied. 'You never really leave Beacon Hills, not if you are tied to the tree.'

She glanced over her shoulder and Stiles saw a wolf there. This one was smaller than Derek had been, and she came forward to show grey around her eyes and scattered through the fur of her muzzle. Her eyes flashed red and he knew it was Talia.

'Derek blames himself a lot.' she said to her and the wolf dropped her head and whined sadly.

'She knows.' Claudia said. 'And she feels just as badly for him. One day, we will be able to explain all of this to you both.'

'But now, you need to fight.' Aneta's face was stern. 'The Darach cannot be allowed to take the tree. She will be unstoppable if she does.'

Stiles drew himself up and took a deep breath steadying himself.

'Okay.' He nodded decisively. 'Tell me what to do.'

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Laura slowed to a trot, her tongue hanging out the side of her mouth. Peter was at her side, panting softly with exertion. They stopped and looked back into the dark, waiting for Chris and Allison to catch up.

Allison was first. She had healed a great deal since they left the house and now she was half shifted, her eyes gold and long pointed ears sticking up through her hair.

'This is crazy.' she enthused, her dimples deep. 'I can smell everything!'

'Dammit.' Chris was out of breath as he drew level. 'You're fast.' He grinned at his daughter and then looked at Laura. 'The bite's definitely taken with no ill effects.'

Laura nodded and then tipped her nose up into the breeze. It was sharp with magic and she sneezed and then took off again, chuffing when Chris swore very colourfully behind her.

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Stiles woke with a start and then wished he hadn't. Everything hurt and he was pretty sure he had a couple of broken bones. He shivered, the cool night air flowing over his bare skin and he felt sick when he realised that he'd been stripped naked and was spreadeagled on the Nemeton, his wrists and ankles bound so tightly he couldn't move.

To his right, a torch had been driven into the ground and was burning with a sickly yellow light. To his left, he caught a glimpse of a furious alpha werewolf trapped in an ash circle, pacing and snarling. It was misshapen and twisted and he breathed a small sigh of relief that the Darach had taken Kate and not Laura again. Then a shadow moved into his line of sight and Stiles felt rage bubble up inside him.

'Not yet.' The Darach leaned over him, her pale eyes light with triumph. 'She has her part to play but I'm not finished readying things. You need to sleep.' Her fingertip rested between his eyes and Stiles tried frantically to move away from her but it was like being anaesthetised and his vision went black.

This time though, Stiles didn't lose consciousness. He could still hear the Darach moving around and even though his eyes were closed and he couldn't see anything or move, he felt something delicately flicking at the edge of his mind. He recalled what Claudia had said to him.

Open your mind up to it, Mischief. Don't be scared. It will protect you.

He relaxed, letting the light touch fill his senses. It grew stronger and in the black he saw a small green glow. Stiles focused on it and when it gently prodded at him, he did what his mother had told him and didn't resist.

It didn't speak to him, not in human terms, but he could understand the soft whisper that was like rustling leaves. It asked and he answered and the green light turned into slender trails, vine-like and sinuous as they wrapped themselves around him and held him close. It felt like being suspended and Stiles settled into it.

I trust you.

He put everything into those words and felt the vines caress his face. The Nemeton felt pleased with his statement and he was tilted and suddenly his vision cleared and he found himself floating above the clearing and looking down at his own unconscious body. He was naked and painted with strange symbols in what looked like blood. Stiles wrinkled his nose instinctively and then watched as the Darach moved away from the stump and towards the fire she had started a few feet away. There was a line of mountain ash around the clearing, shining like a light to Stiles' eyes, in addition to the one around Kate. She was now furiously throwing herself at her confinement, her snarls sounding desperate and the Darach stopped to stand in front of her.

'You deserve everything you're going to get.' Her voice grated like broken glass and Stiles was astonished that he could feel not only her fury, but also her pain. It ran so deep and was so terrible he could understand how the Darach had come to driven to insanity.

Her mate. The Nemeton whispered to him and Stiles saw a vision of two women, one with long straight black hair and crimson eyes and another, sweet faced and with warm brown curls cascading about a face that was lovely and unscarred. He could feel the love between them, the bond that ran so deep it destroyed everything the Darach had when it was ripped from her.

The scene changed and now the alpha wolf lay on the ground, thick black blood gushing from her mouth as she choked on the wolfsbane they had filled her with. One clawed hand reached for her mate even as the red light in her eyes went out.

Julia

Stiles shuddered, feeling a terrible sympathy for the Darach. He could not imagine what it must be like to lose a mate like that and for a brief moment he understood exactly how she felt and how deep her need for revenge was.

I would kill them all too. He said it truthfully. *I would kill them all for him.*

Power without compassion and the will to use it justly will always corrupt. The Nemeton sounded bereft. *She was a good woman once. I will make her ending quick.*

You will work through me? Stiles asked and felt the affirmation flow through him like a wave.

You will be the Spark. The Nemeton replied and the vines rippled around him. *But we are both weak. We need the catalyst.*

Stiles looked to Kate and felt his stomach lurch.

She'll kill her.

Yes. Then her alpha spark will ignite the power in both of us and break us free. After that, it's up to you.

Stiles bit his lip.

I don't know if I can do it. What if it's too much?

Derek will bring you back. The Nemeton told him. *It is why he is your anchor. Trust in him to do that and make me whole once again.*

I trust him with my life. Stiles knew it was true the second he said it.

It was always meant to be. The Nemeton stated. *Now watch and be ready. We're going to change the game a bit.*

The Darach was crouching by a small black bag not too far from the fire. The light hit something in her hand and it gleamed when she stood back up.

'It's time.' she said to Kate, who threw back her head and roared.

Now.

The Nemeton reached for him and Stiles felt it draw out his power, directing it into the stump below him. The tree started to thrum underneath him, and he turned his head to watch it flow out into the trees, lines of blue fire that the Darach completely missed because he was so busy gloating over Kate.

Stiles followed it as best he could and then gasped when he got an impression of thudding paws and panting breath and a desperate need to get to him.

Derek.

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Derek didn't know what hit him exactly, but it hurt like a motherfucker. He stumbled, going ass over tit into the undergrowth and then lying there howling when the pain hit. His whole body felt like it was on fire and he had the terrible thought that this was what it must have felt like for his pack before he starting shaking violently. His bones cracked, not in the familiar way they did when he went to full shift, but beyond and further than he'd ever gone before.

Derek knew about the alpha shift, that it was terribly difficult to achieve and only came on when the pack was in mortal danger. His mother had only used it once before and she'd been both magnificent and horrifying to see. His back bowed as his spine lengthened, his legs growing in size and the bones thickening. His claws pushed out longer and more wickedly curved, designed to rip through things as easily as wet cardboard. His muzzle grew out and his fangs sharpened and he threw himself back and howled into the night before shaking out his coat. He was huge, easily as tall at the shoulder as Stiles was himself.

He pawed the dirt, raking up huge clods before throwing himself forward and running with an easy elastic stride that started to eat up the ground. He could smell better now, and he caught Stiles' and the Darach's scents easily and turned himself towards it.

-

'Shit.' Chris skidded to a stop.

'That was Kate.' Allison's eyes were blazing and when she looked at the other wolves, theirs were alight too.

Peter barked once, demanding they follow and they kept running after him.

They entered a bank of trees and Laura dropped her nose to the ground and started sniffing ferociously. Allison was jealous. Her nose was being flooded with scents and they were all starting to meld together and get confusing. She was looking forward to learning how to control herself. She'd never felt so good, her whole body practically vibrating with energy.

Peter joined his niece and they started tracking through the trees. Allison grinned fiercely and followed. She could hear the roars getting closer but Laura and Peter seemed more focused on what they could smell and she followed them, her father just behind her. He was completely freaked out, his scent acrid and sharp like a noseful of vinegar.

Laura shifted, crouching gracefully and looking right at Allison when she spoke.

'You can't go in there.' she said. 'The Darach's got mountain ash all around the clearing.'

'Crap.' Chris hefted his rifle. 'So just me then.'

'Mountain ash doesn't stop arrows.' Peter had also shifted and Allison looked away. She wasn't quite ready to have to look at his penis yet. 'You just need to make sure she doesn't see or hear both of you.'

'We need a distraction.' Laura nodded at the end of the break of trees. 'I picked up Tara's scent. Deaton's as well and someone else that I don't really know.'

'She's put them under the Nemeton?' Peter asked and Laura nodded.

'It looks like that.' She turned to the Argents. 'I need you both to take the Darach's attention away from this side for a bit. Peter and I can go in from the tunnels on this side. There's an old entrance that will take us right under the Nemeton. We haven't been in there since the fire so I have no idea how stable it is, but if it collapses, you'll need to dig us out.'

'Okay.' Chris tugged at Allison's sleeve. 'Come on, let's go.'

Allison nodded, creeping up the slope behind him. There was the glow of firelight ahead and the sound of chanting got louder. She could also feel the barrier, the same as at the house. It felt not unlike trying to put two magnets that repelled each other together and she kept close to Chris.

At the top, she got her first look into the clearing. The Nemeton was huge, a massive stump in the middle and she could make out Stiles' naked form tied down to it. He wasn't moving, but she could hear the unsteady thump of his heart when she focused and knew he was still alive. Closer to them, she could also see Kate in her alpha form. She was trying to escape her confinement and Allison knew why the second the Darach moved, her black robes making her difficult to spot otherwise.

'Oh no.' Chris breathed and the knife in the Darach's hand glinted as she approached Kate.

'We need to stop her.' she hissed and Chris lifted his rifle to his shoulder.

'Go around the other side.' He was aiming at the Darach. 'See if you can get her to turn around and then I can get off a clean shot.'

‘On it.’ Allison grinned, feeling the sharp points of her new fangs pricking her lower lip. She left him, slinking away around the barrier to the right. The trees thinned out here and she could see more clearly. Stiles was definitely unconscious, his chest rising and falling rapidly. His heart rate was rising and she could smell something deep and earthy rising around her. A quick glance down had her startling and rushing to get away as the very ground seemed like it was starting to come alive.

-

Laura stared at the grate. It had been overgrown and was thick with vegetation. This was the other way underneath the Nemeton and she shivered when she got hold of the grate and yanked. It didn’t budge and she glared at Peter over her shoulder.

‘Um, Help maybe?’

‘Oh.’ He came to take the other side and together they heaved hard enough to dislodge it and make a space big enough for them to crawl through. It was dry underfoot and tree roots hung from the roof of the tunnel but there was no indication the Darach had been that way.

They moved slowly and Laura growled when she caught the distinct scent of magic. She hadn’t been under the tree for so long and her skin crawled with how wrong it felt.

‘I didn’t know it was this bad.’ she whispered and Peter growled agreement.

The tunnel widened a little and they almost fell over each other at the sudden change in the floor level, stumbling into the chamber in front of them. The stink of magic was so thick here that they both sneezed a few times before realising they weren’t alone.

‘Tara!’ Laura was over at her side in a second. She slashed through her bonds in an instant and lowered her to the floor, dimly aware of Peter doing the same for the man at the end. A quick look up and a sniff showed her that Deaton was dead. She rested one hand over Tara’s heart, listening intently. Her heart still beat but it was sluggish.

‘What can I do?’ she asked Peter and he came to kneel by her, the man he’d helped now slumped against the wall on the other side.

‘They’re being drained.’ he said. ‘We’ve stopped the physical danger but unless something breaks the Darach’s spell, they’re still going to end up like our veterinarian up there.’

‘Fuck.’ Laura got hold of Tara and picked her up. ‘Maybe if we get them back to Harley?’

‘Good idea.’ Peter was already moving. ‘I think that’s our best chance.’

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Stiles felt bile rise in his throat. Underneath him, the Darach waved a hand and the barrier between her and Kate fell. Kate crouched, her fangs bared and her body tensed to leap but when she did, the Darach was ready. The tumbling clouds overhead amassed and lightning flared down from them to strike Kate and she convulsed as the electricity surged through her until she was on the ground, screaming as her bones cracked and rearranged and she was back in her human form.

The Darach strode forward, one hand fisting in Kate’s dirty hair and dragging her forward as if she weighed nothing. She got her to the Nemeton and yanked her head up. The silvered blade gleamed as she dragged the edge of it along Kate’s throat, blood spurting onto the edge of the stump. She made a terrible gurgling sound and Stiles could see her body trying to heal itself but the Darach

pulled back and Stiles could see the wound in her throat, the blood still coming in gouts that stained the wood black.

There was a rustling noise and then he was back, slammed into his body so hard it made everything light up white with pain. He was convulsing right along with Kate, his wrists and ankles starting to bleed as he strained against the ropes.

Get ready. The Nemeton sounded as uncertain as he had ever heard it. *It's coming.*

-

Allison was frozen to the spot. Her crossbow was raised but she couldn't fire, too horrified by what she was seeing. She knew academically that the woman busy dying in front of her wasn't her aunt anymore, that maybe she'd never known who Kate was at all but it was still her family being slaughtered like an animal and she screamed in grief and anger.

The Darach raised her head and their eyes met. She smiled gleefully and dropped Kate's limp body to the ground before leaping up onto the Nemeton. She cast aside her robes, her body as scarred as the rest of her and painted with the same symbols that Stiles' was. She raised her hands to the sky, blood running down the hand that held the knife and shouted triumphantly into the night, her voice ringing with an unnatural echo. Allison couldn't understand her, it sounded vaguely like Latin, but when she finally managed to pull the trigger, the arrow went wide as the Darach fell to her knees over Stiles' prone form. A shot rang out and Allison flinched when the bullet hit the tree next to her, knowing that her father was clearly being afflicted in the same way before she was hit by a shock wave that knocked her right off her feet.

She scrambled up and started running, knowing that whatever was coming was going to be big. She could feel it in the way the ground was starting to shake under her feet, the earthy smell intensifying and the trees starting to move like they were alive. She got to the other side and found Chris on his knees, hands clapped over his ears.

'The screaming.' He looked up at her and she saw blood streaming from his nose. 'Can't you hear it?'

'Come on.' Allison dragged him to his feet, glad for her new wolf strength. 'We have to get out of here.'

They skidded down the slope, dirt falling away under their feet and nearly barreling right into Laura and Peter, who were both in half shifted and carrying Tara and a man that Allison didn't recognise.

'Can you feel that?' Peter nodded at Chris. 'You need to carry him. He's not going to make it otherwise.'

Allison nodded, abandoning her weapons and hauling her father over her shoulder, ignoring his protests. She took off after the wolves, hoping like hell they got away before whatever was coming got to them. Just as she broke into a run, she caught a glimpse of something huge and black running past her right towards the Nemeton, heard Laura's frantic scream of Derek and then realised that he was in his full wolf form. That was all she had time before the second shockwave hit, so much bigger than the first. It hit her and the others before they even managed to clear the trees and this time she was sent sailing through the air until she hit something and everything went black.

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Stiles' eyes flew open. He could see the Darach crouched over him and smell the corrupted magic oozing out of her skin. His own was lit up with power, his tattoos coming alive and writhing along his arms and over his shoulders as Kate's alpha spark acted like pulling a jammed log and letting out a deluge of backed up magic that had been allowed to collect for literal years. It burst out of the ground and the Nemeton itself like a pyroclastic flow, scorching everything in its path and putting out enough force to flatten the trees around them.

'Yes!' The Darach was laughing, her head thrown back as she luxuriated in it. 'There is so much to be had here. Once I control it, nothing will stop me!' Her eyes came back down to his, and her rictus grin grew even wider. 'But first, I need to deal with you.'

She clasped the dagger in both hands and raised it up high and Stiles knew that she was going to kill him. He gritted his teeth and fought against the pain of the magic filling him up, his abraded skin and broken bones and let out the sheer rage that he felt at her hurting his father and his mate and his pack.

It came out of him in a wordless scream of his own and he saw her flinch at the sound of his voice. He heard an answering roar in the distance and his heart soared when he recognised it. He laughed in the Darach's face as he heard the snarl of an angry wolf and was delighted when he felt the first flicker of fear from her and she let go of the knife to punch him in the face to try and shut him up. It took a second for him to recover but when he did Stiles grinned at her, tasting blood.

'Oh you're in for it now, bitch. He's coming and he is pissed.' He tilted his head back and used all his magic to rip a hole just big enough right through the barrier she had up. The black wolf with burning blue eyes charging towards them sailed right through it and launched into the Darach, knocking her flying from the Nemeton and onto the ground. She landed with a thump and Derek was on her the second his paws hit the ground. They fought, the Darach screaming and Derek snarling, a rolling mass of wolf and druid. Stiles fell back and focused on the power pouring out of the Nemeton. It was too much, the pain in his head making him feel like he was about to explode head first.

Mischief! Focus!

Claudia's voice rang through it all like a bell. It gave him enough strength to focus again and this time he managed to concentrate enough to turn his attention to the ropes that held him down. The fire he'd used before was the first thing he thought of and it lit up along his arms and ran down his body, burning the ropes into fine white ash.

Stiles sat up, wincing at the pain in his sides. He got both hands under him and pushed up onto his knees. Derek had the upper hand and Stiles got a quick flash of fangs before the Darach screamed and there was a sharp cracking noise. Derek wrenched his head to the side and Stiles wanted to vomit when he saw that he'd ripped the Darach's forearm clean from her body, the ragged flesh from the torn end just visible between his jaws.

He's strong. The Nemeton chimed in his head. You make him strong. He's drawing his power from you. Together, you will finish her.

'Derek!' He could feel the bond between them flare back into being. It pulsed with righteous anger and protectiveness and love for him, love so strong that it took Stiles' breath away. Below him Derek lifted his head and dropped the Darach's arm, his lips pulled back to reveal bloodstained fangs. He was massive, an awesome hybrid of wolf and man covered in inky black fur and with fangs as long as Stiles' hand. He had the Darach pinned to the ground with one huge clawed hand and Stiles grinned.

‘Look at you.’ he breathed. ‘You’re incredible.’

Derek growled low in his throat and Stiles breathed in, drawing in the power that was rushing through him. He held up a hand and watched as the fire wrapped itself around it, sealing up the welts in his wrist. The pain in his sides eased and then faded completely, and he knew it was Derek’s werewolf healing that was doing it, just like his power boost earlier had helped Derek turn into the beautiful monster he saw in front of him.

‘Miezko.’ Aneta faded out of darkness, the torchlight shimmering through her. Derek whined and looked at him and Stiles shrugged, leaping down from the stump.

‘Babcia, what do we do?’ he asked.

‘You need to right the tree.’ Aneta replied. ‘Dispell the excess magic and drain the toxins that she has leaked into it.’

‘I can do that.’ Stiles said. ‘And the Darach?’

‘She must die.’ Aneta said, her face perfectly calm. ‘Die so we can restore the balance and you can become the rightful emissary of Beacon Hills. The Nemeton is yours, Miezko, just like Derek is yours. Finish it.’

Stiles looked down at the Darach, whimpering in pain and terror. What was left of her arm was a bloody mess and she was riddled with bites and slashes from Derek’s claws. All her magic couldn’t protect her from his wrath and Stiles could feel how she was weakening as the Nemeton sucked her magic away.

‘Let me.’ he said and Derek eased up, moving to the side so Stiles could come and stand over her.

Stiles. Release us both.

He closed his eyes and listened to the Nemeton, feeling the way it filled him up with magic. The green vines from before wrapped around his mind and and fire wrapped around his arms and the Nemeton’s roots grew out from the ground to enshroud the screaming Darach. They tied her limbs close to her body and lifted her into the air, squeezing the life out of her. She wheezed and cried and Stiles felt sorry for her and the shitty things that had brought her to this point, but he was ruthless when it came to the people he loved.

‘I’m sorry.’ he said. ‘But this must be done.’

He raised both hands and the vines twisted and dragged her into the earth. It flowed like lava around her body and she screamed all the way down until it closed over her head and she finally fell silent.

The power surged inside him and Stiles fell back against the stump. He was being overtaken by the Nemeton and remembered what he’d been told.

‘Derek.’ He wheezed, his chest feeling like it was being crushed by the magic pouring into him. ‘Please.’

Derek was on him in a second, his huge clawed hands gentle as he eased Stiles back onto the stump. His eyes were glowing electric bright and he shifted in front of Stiles’ eyes back into his human form.

‘I’ve got you.’ he murmured, somehow still audible over the cacophony of magic and Stiles smiled

and reached for him, pulling him down into a kiss.

It was as if the whole world stopped for a second and then it came with brilliant clarity. Stiles opened his mouth and his mind to him, feeling Derek take up residence in every corner of his soul. This was a bond beyond the one they shared, this was like being the same person and he felt Derek's overwhelming love for him as keenly as Derek must be feeling his. It came with a wash of want that was so strong that Stiles could not resist.

His legs fell open and he grabbed Derek's hips. Derek whined and glanced down and Stiles followed his eyes to where they were both hard.

'Yes.' he panted. 'I want it. I want you. You can bring me back down.'

'Your anchor.' Derek smiled at him and he was so beautiful it hurt Stiles to look at him. He leaned up to kiss him again and Derek responded with a deep growl that vibrated through them both, lowering himself to where Stiles was waiting. There was no way he was going to be able to stop this, didn't want to and he simply let the magic do its work.

Derek ran his nose along Stiles' neck, tongue dragging a hot path until his fangs were resting where it met Stiles' shoulder. He lapped at the skin, his cock leaving a stream of wetness on Stiles' skin. He could feel it inside too, his body easing in readiness and when Derek pressed inside, there was no pain. Stiles cried out and tilted his hips up to meet Derek's thrust, his thick cock driving home in one movement that filled Stiles all the way up.

He wrapped his legs round Derek's hips, pulling him as deep as he could go. Derek moaned and braced himself over him on his forearms, the light in his eyes burning and his fangs bared as he threw his head back. He started moving, each push inside deep enough to make Stiles gasp. He dug his nails into Derek's skin and met his eyes, their breathing harsh and their skin starting to gleam with sweat as Derek fucked him relentlessly. It went on and on, both of them lost in each other and the magic that floated around them like tiny motes of fire in the air.

'Derek.' Stiles could hardly breathe through the pleasure. 'Fuck...I...I want...'

'I know.' Derek growled. He twisted his hips and suddenly Stiles could feel it, a thickening at the base of his cock. It was swelling, pressing inexorably against that place inside him that was making him lost and desperate.

'Is that...?' He laughed, delighted. 'You're knotting me?'

'Apparently.' Derek smiled and kissed him frantically before pulling back and burying his face in Stiles neck. 'Please. I love you. Can I?'

Stiles reached up, sinking his fingers into Derek's hair and pulling him in close.

'Do it.' He whispered into his ear. 'I'm yours.'

The bite hurt but it was the glorious kind of pain that made everything shocky and brilliant and he came hard enough that it felt like everything around him shut down for a second, their very heartbeats stopping for a second as Derek sank his fangs in deep and came inside him. He threw his head back and roared and Stiles let the power in, feeling it sink into his skin and bones and blood until the forest finally fell quiet.

They lay there for long moments, battling for breath. Eventually Stiles snickered and jabbed Derek in the ribs with a pointy finger, then swept a hand over his sweaty skin. The magic was sticking to them both like they'd been glitter bombed and it was beautiful.

'You're heavy.' he complained. Derek lifted his head. His eyes were back to green and looked a little bleary.

'Sorry.' he sniped. 'But I just came my fucking brains out. I think you can give me a minute.'

Stiles burst out laughing and kissed him. Derek snorted through his nose, kissing back. It was messy and uncoordinated and he whined like a puppy when Stiles shoved at him, yelping when he realised that Derek wasn't going anywhere.

'Fuck.' He glared at him.

'What?' Derek gave him a grin that was distinctly shit-eating. 'It's a knot, Stiles. I'm sure you know how it works.'

'Goddammit.' Stiles thunked his head on the stump, wincing at the little flare of pain. 'So we're tied here for how long?'

'Not sure.' Derek was smug. 'I've never done this before.' He leaned down and licked up Stiles' cheek. 'You taste amazing.'

'Puppy.' Stiles pawed at him feebly. 'I feel funny.'

'Funny ha-ha or funny strange?' Derek asked. 'Also, what the fuck? You stopped the Nemeton from going supernova?'

'I did.' Stiles beamed at him. 'I totally did.' He could feel it, like a peasant glow under his skin. 'Damn, that's going to be addictive.'

'Impressive.' Derek wriggled and they both sucked in a sharp breath. 'Okay, maybe if we try on our sides?'

It took a bit of maneuvering but they finally made it onto their sides and then with Derek on his back because Stiles was starting to get worked up again.

'I wonder what happened to her.' he mused, gently rocking on Derek's cock. It was much better being on top he decided and wriggled into a more promising position.

'You know, you're not helping it go down.' Derek hissed through gritted teeth, although Stiles noted that he wasn't fighting him off and was even guiding his hips with both hands now. 'And I'm guessing the tree ate her.'

'Gross.' Stiles snickered and fell forward to kiss him. He felt Derek smile into the kiss and hummed happily, their bond singing as saplings started to sprout around them.

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Three months later

Stiles pulled the jeep up outside the bookshop and hopped out, smiling as he went to the door. The bell jingled when he opened it and he went inside, snorting when he caught Chris and Peter kissing over the counter.

'Stiles.' Peter looked a little flushed in the cheeks and he made a show of brushing himself down as Stiles approached. 'I thought you were at the station today.'

'Dad let me leave early.' Stiles grinned. 'He's taking Melissa for lunch and having the afternoon

off. Tara insisted.'

'How is she?' Chris asked. He'd grown a beard and Stiles had to say that it was a good look on him. Then again, being retired from hunting was also a good look on him, especially after it got out that his daughter was now a werewolf and part of the Hale pack. That would have been a headache too far, so Chris had chucked it all in and was now on the Beacon Hills PD payroll as a specialist consultant. He'd even set up his own supernatural detective agency. Danny and Jackson had both decided that they wanted in and business was just starting to boom. Lydia had taken up her full ride to MIT and she'd already gone on a road trip with Laura to get settled in, with lots of promises to come back and visit all the time.

'Good. She's better than ever now that everything is fixed.' Stiles stuck his hands in his hoodie pockets. He had taken to wearing one all the time now. His tattoos were temperamental at best while he learned to deal with being the Nemeton's conduit and they had a habit of moving on their own which was difficult to explain. Tara and Harley and he were very close now, Tara teaching him all she knew and Harley being a great study-buddy for all things magic. They had spent most of the summer in the preserve with him learning how to work with the Nemeton and rebalance everything else.

The Darach's death had only been the start. His dad had taken time to recover, coming right out of the coma around the same time Stiles had buried the Darach and her magic, and so had Dr Geyer. Tara had been drafted in as temporary sheriff as soon as she was feeling up to it and Allison had started training as Laura's successor every time Laura had an off shift. Both Noshiko and Satomi had decided that being the next Alpha was definitely in the cards for her and it kept them both happy and from missing Lydia too much. Stiles had an inkling that just maybe there was something going on between the three of them but he kept it quiet. The rest of the senior pack were enjoying their last summer of freedom before going off to CSU together in Sacramento. Erica and Isaac were working in the town's only thrift store and Boyd had a horticulture gig just out of town. The weed he'd been experimenting with was incredible and the pack had spent many a happy evening swimming in the lake and getting high and looking at the stars.

Scott and Kira were going strong and they'd formed a little posse of their own with Cora and Liam Geyer and his friends, now that his family was in the know. The Yukimuras had decided that their move should be permanent and their presence had given the town an added layer of protection. The Darach had been outed as Julia Baccari, the mate of the murdered alpha Kali Baccari. Deucalion had brought them the news and there had been a conference about what to do with the Nemeton and the town and it had ended up with Stiles being sworn in as the Hale emissary by Marin, Deucalion's emissary and Deaton's estranged sister. She had also turned out to be a great therapist and Stiles had Skype sessions three times a week with her.

'Well.' Peter gave him a knowing look. 'I'm guessing you're not here to talk to us, so I'll take advantage of you being here and close up a little early today.' He winked at Stiles as he went to grab his keys. 'He's upstairs.'

'I know.' Stiles said, smiling. He could track Derek in the dark in a room of a hundred people by now. 'Have fun.'

Chris gave him a mock salute as he herded Peter out the door and Stiles waited until their car had pulled away before going upstairs. He took his time, humming to himself as he cleared away some books and closed down the register. He wrapped up some volumes for delivery and only then did he climb the iron steps, staying as quiet as he could. Laura had made good on her word and given Derek permission to move into the apartment above the bookstore. Derek liked to say it was so he could be independent but Stiles knew it was because the pack were sick of walking in on them

fucking everywhere in the house.

He got to the doorway and grinned. Derek was reading on the sagging green velvet couch they'd found at an estate sale. Stiles had protested that someone had probably died on it but Derek loved it and he had to admit it was pretty comfortable. He let his eyes drift over his mate. Derek was in faded jeans and a grey henley, his pendant a just hidden gleam on his chest. Stiles automatically reached for his own, magic tingling through his fingers and singing through their bond.

'Hey.' He walked over, stopping to shed his sneakers before lifting Derek's bare feet and settling into the side he'd designated as his. 'Are you slacking on the job?'

'Maybe.' Derek didn't even look up at him. 'Are you staying over?'

'Maybe.' Stiles replied, wrinkling his nose at him. 'Depends on what's on offer.'

That got him a chuckle from behind the book, before it was lowered and Derek did a very impressive crunch to bring himself up to kiss him. It lingered and Stiles was starry eyed when they parted. He blinked, seeing the magic drift around them in little shiny scatters of light.

'Oh.' He looked at Derek and smiled at the way Derek's green eyes were sparkling. 'That's what's on offer?' He tried to sound casual, but his tattoos were already lighting up.

'Only if you want to.' Derek's answering smile was all teeth. He pulled Stiles in for another kiss, their tongues tangling lazily before he dropped the book and caught Stiles by surprise.

He hoisted him up and over his shoulder and Stiles laughed like a child, hands out to catch the motes of light as Derek carried him to bed and the place he belonged best.

'I love you.' he breathed, looking up into his mate's eyes. Derek snorted and kissed the tip of his nose.

I love you too.' he replied and then they didn't speak for quite some time.

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